Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

Michael Bittman, Sonia Hoffmann and Denise Thompson
Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales
Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to the research participants who so freely provided the information on which this research is based. We are grateful to the management of the organisations, known in this report as Company number one and Company number two, for making these case studies possible. We are particularly grateful to those individuals within both organisations who acted as key contacts, arranging meetings, organising venues and providing us with the opportunity to report our findings back to the research participants.

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of staff of the Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. They played a crucial role in commissioning the research, shaping its focus and soliciting the cooperation of the two organisations at the core of the study. In particular we would like to thank Gerry Orkin, Mary Mertin, Kathleen O’Ryan and Mark Cawley of the former Family Relationships Branch of FaCS, and Jenny Earle, Gerry van Wyk and Sue Williamson from the Work and Family Unit at DEWR. The authors would also like to thank Craig Brown and Denise Ryan of the Strategic Policy and Knowledge Branch of FaCS for their role in coordinating and facilitating this research conducted under the Research Services agreement between FaCS and the Social Policy Research Centre.

February 2004

Refereed publication

Submissions to the department’s Policy Research Paper series are subject to a blind peer review. This referee process is recognised by the Department of Education, Science and Training.

For more information
Publications Unit
(RC&C Section)
Strategic Policy and Knowledge Branch (TOP CW2)
Department of Family and Community Services
Box 7788
Canberra Mail Centre  ACT 2610

Phone:  (02) 6244 5458
Fax:  (02) 6244 7020
Email:  publications.research@facs.gov.au
## Contents

Executive summary ix  
Structure of this report xi  

### Part one: Literature review

1. Introduction 1  
2. Increasing interest in men’s involvement in child care 3  
   2.1 Men’s interest 4  
   2.2 The importance of fathers 6  
   2.3 Shared parenting 7  
   2.4 Why businesses have become interested in work-family balance 10  
   2.5 Issues concerning the public provision of child care 12  
   2.6 ‘Gender equity’ 13  
   2.7 Falling fertility 15  
3. Family-friendly practices 17  
   3.1 National policies on parental leave 17  
   3.2 Australia 25  
   3.3 International trends in men’s take-up of leave provisions 29  
   3.4 Men’s take-up of leave provisions in Australia 34  
   3.5 Other family-friendly strategies 45  
4. Some reasons why men do not take-up opportunities to care for their children 53  
   4.1 Money 53  
   4.2 Career 54  
   4.3 ‘Culture’ 54  
   4.4 Workforce pressures 56  
   4.5 Other reasons 56  
5. Some issues 59
# Part two: Case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Concepts guiding the research design</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Company number one</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>A family-friendly company?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Formal policy</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Informal arrangements</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The benefits of work-life balance</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Attracting staff</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Retaining staff</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Happy employees</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Balancing work and family</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Male employees’ family responsibilities</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Family responsibilities of employees’ partners</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Responsibility for day-to-day child care</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Negotiating decisions about work and family</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>Work and life balance</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>What ‘family’ means</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>Male employees’ participation in the WorkLife Taskforce</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Take-up of provisions by men</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Formal family-friendly policies</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Informal flexibility for ‘one-offs’</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>Policies for men?</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Barriers to men’s take-up of family-friendly initiatives</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Only for women?</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>Difficulties with implementation</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>Men’s earning capacity</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12.6 Career 113
12.7 Workload 115
13 Company number two 121
  13.1 Introduction 121
  13.2 A family-friendly company? 121
14 Formal policy 129
  14.1 In the Award and the EBA 129
  14.2 Informants’ comments on the policies 131
15 Informal arrangements at the local level 135
  15.1 Informal arrangements 135
  15.2 Trust 135
  15.3 Examples of informal arrangements in action 136
  15.4 The best way 137
  15.5 Outcomes 138
  15.6 Problems with informality 139
  15.7 Solving the problems 141
16 The benefits of work-life balance 143
  16.1 Happy employees 143
  16.2 Productivity 143
  16.3 Retaining staff 145
  16.4 Attracting staff 145
  16.5 The broader community 146
  16.6 Disadvantages 146
17 Balancing work and family 147
  17.1 Male employees’ family responsibilities 147
  17.2 Partners’ family responsibilities 150
  17.3 Combining work and family 151
18 Barriers to men’s take-up of family-friendly initiatives 155
  18.1 Difficulties with implementation 155
  18.2 Culture 155
  18.3 Career 163
Table 9: Employees with children under 12 who took parental/carers leave in 2000

Table 10: Working time preferences of employees with children under 12 in 2000

Table 11: Employees' working hours preference

Table 12: Employees' working hours preference by sex

Table 13: Use of working arrangements to care for children, 1999

Table 14: Fathers' use of work arrangements to care for children, 1993, 1996 and 1999

Table 15: Employees who had a career break of six months or more, 1998

Table 16: Employees with and without children under 12 who took a career break

Table 17: Reasons for career break

Table 18: Employees with children under six years who took a career break when their youngest child was born

Table 19: Length of time taken off work when youngest child was born

Table 20: Whether leave was paid or unpaid

Table 21: Proportions of males and females working full-time and part-time, Western Australia, 1993

Table 22: Proportions of males and females working full-time and part-time, Australian Capital Territory, 1993

Table 23: Working arrangements made to accommodate family responsibilities, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, 1993

Table 24: Persons who provided care in the six months prior to October 2000

Table 25: Type of work arrangements

Table 26: Part-time workers by sex, 1995, 1997 and 2000

Table 27: Reasons given for fathers not taking parental leave, Denmark, children born 1984–89

Figure 1: Conceptual map of research on fathers’ uptake
Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions
Executive summary

This report of research into men's uptake of family-friendly workplace provisions consists of two parts: a review of the literature in the area; and two case studies of companies that have introduced family-friendly policies into the workplace.

Previous research

Recently there has been an increasing interest in men's involvement in child care due to declining popular support for the traditional sexual division of labour, greater 'gender equity', men's own increased interest in fathering and corporations seeking to become 'employers of choice' for skilled employees.

This report reviews the advantages and disadvantages for men of managing the competing demands of work and family—part-time work, flexible hours, shift-work and nonstandard hours—noting that take-up rates for Australian men are low. In 1999, only 18 per cent of fathers used flexible hours to balance work and family, and 73 per cent did not use a single family-friendly provision. A mere 2 per cent of men indicated that they had switched to part-time work for child care reasons. More than two-thirds of fathers with preschool-age children said that their partner was the usual carer of these children.

The report gives details of policies designed to encourage men's use of parental leave in 10 countries. Men's uptake of gender-neutral parental leave has been one of the most researched topics in the international literature. Only the Nordic countries have achieved high take-up rates, and they have done this by providing periods of parental leave that can only be used by fathers. Among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, the United States (US), Australia and South Korea are the only ones that make no statutory provision at the national level for paid leave for family purposes.

In Australia, there is limited information about fathers' use of leave to care for their young children. Only about 4 per cent of male employees took a break lasting longer than six weeks in the six months preceding a survey conducted in 1998. On the whole, fathers are no more likely than non-parents to have taken a career break of this length. Two-thirds of those current employees who took a career break were women.

Case studies of barriers to men's take-up of family-friendly workplace provisions

The two companies where the case studies were carried out are from contrasting sectors of the economy, the first a manufacturer operating in a highly competitive market, and the second a corporatised public utility. Both companies have received recognition as leaders in the provision of policies to aid the reconciliation of work and...
family life. Despite their differences, there were striking similarities in the outcomes of their policies.

Barriers to men’s use of available provisions arose from three sources: the organisation of the workplace; the business environment in which the firm operated; and the domestic organisation in employees’ own homes.

Among the workplace barriers discouraging fathers’ take-up were:

- the unevenness of provision of family-friendly conditions
- the novelty of men’s utilisation
- doubts about the legitimacy of men’s claims to family responsibilities
- negative attitudes on the part of immediate supervisors
- informal practices and taken-for-granted assumptions
- the workload burden resulting from measuring performance by outcomes rather than by length of time spent at the workplace.

Employees, supervisors and even some senior managers thought that breaks or reductions in working hours could irreversibly damage men’s careers.

Factors arising from the business environment include competitive pressures to maintain market share and increase earnings and dividends. These pressures often lead to efforts to control costs by reducing staffing levels and not replacing staff while still maintaining output targets; thus contributing to employees working long hours.

Fathers employed in both companies had a child-centred view of fatherhood. They believed being a ‘good father’ involved forming an intimate relationship with the children based on spending direct face-to-face time with them. Like most modern fathers, they subscribed to the ideal of shared parenting and thought that the sexual division of labour in their household was the result of negotiated agreements. However despite the rhetoric, in most cases both parents acknowledged that it was the father’s career, and not the mother’s, that was central.

The research showed that masculine identity and the role of economic provider (breadwinner) are powerfully entwined. Despite the enthusiastic adoption of a child-centred view of family life and a commitment to the ideal of shared parenting, most of the male employees in these two case studies tended to give work priority over family.

Men find that it is difficult to fit family around the demands of work. Most men agreed they did not find enough time for their families: ‘You try to be there as much as you can, but you can’t be’.
The structure of this report

This research report consists of two parts: a review of the literature in the area; and two case studies of companies that have introduced family-friendly policies into the workplace.

The first part of the report discusses previous research on men’s use of family-friendly workplace provisions, and attempts to identify the barriers to take-up of existing provisions. What is known about men’s use of family-friendly measures tends to suggest that rates are low, although the topic is a comparatively neglected one. Nonetheless, it should be informative to survey what has happened elsewhere. There are lessons to be learned, and this survey of existing research provides pointers towards major areas of interest.

The second section of the report outlines the methodological framework used to undercover potential barriers to fathers’ utilisation of their companies purpose-designed family-friendly provisions. In a field where so little is known, the appropriate form of research is small-scale, in-depth and reliant on qualitative techniques. The design of the research needs to be exploratory in nature. In general terms, this study is a ‘process evaluation’, focusing on how the family-friendly provisions were implemented and how they worked in practice. The strategy developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Departments of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) was to select two firms recognised for their innovatory approach to work-family policy. The chosen companies were drawn from different industries, with varying degrees of exposure to competition and business imperatives. These differences provided an opportunity for investigating whether or not the contrasting character of the companies, their business environments and policy settings, had any influence on outcomes.
The structure of this report
Part one: Literature review

1 Introduction

Women and men experience the labour market in different ways. Women are far more likely than men, for example, to take career breaks during their working lives because of family responsibilities and interrupt their careers to stay at home with pre-school age children. They are also more likely to take parental leave, to be the one who stays home from work to look after a sick child, and work part-time or at unsociable hours in order to combine work and family responsibilities.

In contrast, men tend to spend long hours at work while their children are young. In fact, the ages at which men are likely to be having children are also the ages when they are likely to be working the longest hours they will ever work, as they establish their careers.

These labour market patterns have a number of implications. For women, either they take on the double load of paid work and parenting, or they must be financially dependent for at least the early years of parenting, as well as having difficulty recovering their labour market status on returning to the workforce. For men, there is the likelihood of missing out on some of the most important years of their children’s development because they are largely absent from the household, while the children miss out on their relationships with their fathers. Both men and women suffer stress relating to their parenting and workloads.

The negative outcomes for men relating to their absence from the household during their parenting years have begun to be documented over the last few years. There is some evidence to suggest that men are saying they are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their balance between work and family and that they want to spend more time with their children.

On the other hand, there is broad agreement in the literature that men are reluctant to take up family-friendly provisions (e.g. career breaks, parental leave, part-time work), both because of the effects this has (or is perceived to have) on income and status, and for personal identity and career progression reasons. There is thus a discrepancy between what men say they want (i.e. to be more involved in parenting), and what they do, or rather fail to do (i.e. take up family-friendly provisions at the workplace).

This literature review aims to bring together findings of previous research on the availability of family-friendly provisions and men’s patterns of use, and identify and understand the barriers to men’s take-up of existing provisions. Men’s use of family-friendly workplace provisions is a neglected topic, although what is known tends to suggest that incidence rates are low. Although the qualitative research in this area is
small scale, almost on a case studies model, and it will be difficult to generalise confidently, it should be informative to survey what has happened elsewhere. The review will help identify which sorts of family-friendly provisions men currently use and/or would be likely to take up—something that hasn’t been researched to any great degree in Australia. It will also provide a foundation for considering future developments and research by both FaCS and DEWR.
2 Increasing interest in men’s involvement in child care

Concern with men’s involvement in caring for their children is a fairly recent development in social policy. Family-friendly work practices in general have a comparatively short history, with the 1970s being a kind of take-off point for their development (Kamerman 2000). Wolcott and Glezer remark that, in the 1960s, the notion of workplace provisions enabling people to balance work and family life would have been incomprehensible (Wolcott and Glezer 1995, p. xv), while Eveline points out that the idea of family-friendly work practices was unheard of before the 1980s (Eveline 1999). The main growth of family leave policies, at least in the OECD countries, occurred between 1980 and the mid-1990s (Kamerman 2000).

In Australia, interest in these developments dates from the Australian Government’s ratification of ILO Convention 156, ‘Workers with Family Responsibilities’, in 1990. As part of the strategy to implement this convention, there was a community education campaign to encourage a fairer division of paid and unpaid work between women and men, and a Dependent Care Study was commissioned to investigate the ways in which women and men juggle their work and family commitments (VandenHeuvel, 1993). The Work and Family Unit (WFU) within what is now DEWR was also established in 1990 in response to the ratification of Convention 156 (Commonwealth of Australia 2002, p. 38).

Workplace provisions for enabling the balancing of work and family life can be many and various, including flexible leave arrangements both paid and unpaid, flexible working hours, part-time work, shift-work and non-standard hours, job sharing, home-based work, child care provision, etc. The availability of flexible hours is well documented in official publications (WFU 1999). However, meaningful information about the uptake of these provisions and the frequency with which they are used to help balance the competing demands of work and family is scarce.

Originally, workplace arrangements enabling a balance between work and family responsibilities were regarded as solely the province of women. For a number of reasons, however, men’s participation in the raising of children has recently become an issue for social policy (Hobson, ed. 2002). Some of those reasons include:

- men’s own expressed interest in having more time with their children
- the business benefits
- what is often referred to as ‘gender equity’
- the inadequacy of child care provision.

As well, there are broader demographic and social issues involved, among them: falling fertility rates in the developed nations and a consequent concern with the aging
of the population; the need for women’s labour power; and a concern with changing the traditional roles of women and men (Haas 1992, p. 56).

2.1 Men’s interest

One reason commonly given is the growing interest among men in spending more time with their children, and in contributing to caring for them (Glezer 1991; Russell 1983a; Russell 1983b; Moss 1995; Levine and Pittinsky 1997; Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 1999; Russell and Bowman, 2000; Hobson, ed., 2002; Hand and Lewis, 2002). As early as the 1980s, commentators were noting that ‘more men want to…take a more active part in the lives of their children from the start’. As evidence for this desire on the part of men, Kiechel cited a study which showed that ‘the percentage of fathers present in the delivery room for the birth of their children has risen from about 25 per cent in the 1960s to 80 per cent in the mid-1980s’ (Kiechel 1986).

Saltzman cited a study by Du Pont that showed a shift in male attitudes to child care, from 1985 when 18 per cent of male employees said they were interested in part-time work in order to have more time with their children, to 1988 when the proportion of those who said so had risen to 33 per cent. She interpreted this to mean that, for many young fathers, workplace arrangements to enable men to care for children were a necessity. ‘There is no question’, she said, ‘that [men] are spending more time with their kids by altering their work schedules or making flexible time arrangements with their bosses’ (Saltzman 1988).

A 1989 survey conducted for an executive recruiting firm in the US found that 74 per cent of the men surveyed said that they would prefer a ‘daddy track’ job over a ‘fast-track’ job. ‘The current generation of fathers’, McEnroe observed, ‘is less willing to place work above family’ (McEnroe 1991).

More recently, Cunningham remarked that ‘a host of research shows that, if made financially feasible, men would be coming home in droves to be with their families during the critical days and weeks that follow birth’ (Cunningham 2001); while the UK Department of Trade and Industry commented that ‘an increasing number of men want to play a more active role in supporting their partner following the arrival of a new child’ (UK Department of Trade and Industry 2000, ch. 3, pt 24). As Russell put it: ‘some (or maybe even many) fathers want to be more involved, to be more expressive and nurturing, and to share in both child care and paid work’ (Russell 1983b, p. 1).

In the late 1980s, LaRossa sounded a warning that these changes may be more cosmetic than real, that they were ‘cultural’, a matter of attitudes and what people wanted to believe was true, rather than a source of actual change in men’s behaviour (LaRossa 1988). Smith, too, warned that a father’s attendance at the birth is not in itself an indication of subsequent involvement with his child. She said that 97 per cent of fathers in the UK Avon Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood attended the
birth, but that a quarter of them had done so under duress, and that nearly two-thirds of these were subsequently not involved in the practical care of their infants. She commented that a father’s bonding with his child depended less on his attendance at the birth, and more on his own attitude (Smith 1995, pp. 21–2).

In their longitudinal study of 116 Swedish families, Hwang and Lamb found that fathers’ involvement with their children remained fairly stable over time. Those who were participating in their children’s care when the children were toddlers (16 months, the age of the first-born children at the start of the study) were still involved when the children were eight and a half (the age of the children at the end of the study) (Hwang and Lamb 1997). Brandth and Kvande found, in their study of Norwegian men who had taken the paternity quota of leave to care for their children in 1994–95, that 97 per cent said they had done so because they wanted to stay home with their child. In the case of Norwegian fathers, under the special circumstances provided by the Norwegian state (see below), that desire has been translated into practice. Fathers saw the paternity quota, these authors said, ‘as a right the state had given them—almost as if they had received a gift they could not refuse’ (Brandth and Kvande 2001, pp. 259–60).

Smith’s study indicated that British men’s involvement with their children has been rising steadily, at least as it is perceived by the mothers, from 39 per cent of those who were mothers in the 1950s (39 of 99 respondents) reporting help with the children from husbands or partners, to just over 82 per cent (236 of 286 respondents) in the early 1990s.

Table 1: Levels of paternal involvement with infant care over five decades, reported by mothers in the UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1993, Sommer could refer to a body of international research that was increasingly showing ‘modern fatherhood’ defined in terms of care of, and involvement with, children. This author attributed the growing interest to three factors: research into fathers’ actual involvement with children; a concern with greater equality between men and women; and the growing levels of women’s participation in the labour force (Sommer 1993, p. 157).
2.2 The importance of fathers

Another reason often given for the growing social relevance of men's caring for children is the belief that men have an important role to play in the raising of children (McBride and Darragh 1995, p. 490; Russell and Bowman 2000). As the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health put it:

Today it is seen increasingly clearly that the father has his own independent status as an equal and important parent for his child, starting from the child's earliest developmental stages...Active fatherhood is a positive feature both for equality between men and women and for the development of children (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999).

As Russell said: 'Fathers and mothers are equally capable of...providing the day-to-day care for their children...[and] they are equally important to their children' (Russell 1983a, p. 3). His study found that, in families where the father shared the care-giving, an improved father-child relationship was the advantage rated most highly by both mothers and fathers (Russell 1982a, p. 150; Russell 1982b, p. 158).

Sommer argues that children need contact with men in a variety of ways, so that they 'can learn the consequences of growing up in a world which does after all consist of two sexes'. This author points out that this does not always mean 'the typical nuclear family', and that it is the overall social network that needs to be taken into account in any assessment of the extent to which children come into contact with men (Sommer 1993, p. 155).

The role of men in the care and upbringing of children, however, can be overstated. A Yale professor of psychiatry, for example, is reported to have found that the children of fathers who 'took a primary parenting role...had more social confidence and were better problem solvers than those raised more conventionally', a difference which was attributed to 'the more energetic way men play with kids' (Levine 1987). But this finding is problematic. Apart from the potentially disparaging implications that children raised by mothers are disadvantaged and that mothers are less competent parents than fathers, there is the small size of the sample—17 families—and the lack of a control group of ‘more conventional’ families.

Some commentators have argued that most social problems are caused by fathers’ absence from their families: ‘More than virtually any other factor, a biological father’s presence in the family will determine a child’s success and happiness...a missing father is a better predictor of criminal activity than race or poverty...[There are] links between a father’s absence and his child’s likelihood of being a dropout, jobless, a drug addict, a suicide victim, mentally ill and a target of child sexual abuse...absent fathers are behind most social woes’ (Shapiro et al. 1995). However, father absence and poverty...
tend to be connected and it is unclear whether researchers are describing the effects of father absence or poverty on the child’s likely involvement in ‘criminal activity’.

Such arguments are, anyway, an overstatement. Russell advised caution in interpreting studies finding significant differences between children with different levels of father-involvement in their upbringing. He commented that the findings are usually ‘more remarkable for the absence of differences’ in the children (Russell 1984a, p. 9), and that ‘major differences in child development outcomes perhaps should not be expected’, given the range and diversity of factors likely to influence children’s development (Russell 1982b, p. 168). Lamb emphasised caution even more strongly, saying that more research, especially longitudinal research, was necessary before any reliable generalisations could be made about the effects, if any, on child development of fathers’ involvement in care-giving (Lamb 1982, p. 159). Radin found that the verbal intelligence test scores of both boys and girls, and their ‘internality’ (their ‘self-esteem, flexibility, interpersonal sensitivity, and some sense of controlling [their] own destiny’—Radin and Sagi 1982, p. 113) were ‘positively correlated with degree of paternal involvement’ (Radin 1981, p. 511). But as Johansson put it, ‘[t]o explain social problems like violence and crime rates in the light of absent fathers is…to simplify matters, and it is also to diminish the role of mothers’. Nonetheless, as she went on to say, ‘[t]o encourage both sexes to participate in the child’s life could have liberating effects’ (Johansson 2000). Radin and Sagi have suggested that those effects might be due, not so much to fathers’ participation as such, but to the fact that care-giving fathers were ‘creating new roles in families’. It was this breaking of the traditional mould that was more likely to be responsible for the children showing greater self-reliance and ‘an internal locus of control’ (Radin and Sagi 1982, p. 113).

2.3 Shared parenting

For a number of reasons, shared parenting has become more of a possibility in the last two decades than previously. There is general agreement that the major reason is the increase in dual-earner households (Russell 1984a; Deutsch, 1999; Sanson and Wise 2001). Deutsch refers to the ‘overwhelming labor demands of a two-job household’ and the fact that traditional roles did not work in that situation. She said that mothers in paid employment were working ‘second shifts’ at home, and that, ‘[a]lthough women were taking on paid employment in record numbers, their husbands weren’t returning the favor’ (Deutsch 1999, p. 11, 37, 3). Russell mentions the growing recognition of the difficulties involved in parenting full-time and in combining paid work with parenting, and a growing appreciation of the needs and options of women. There has also been an increasing interest in fathers’ involvement, he said, both as a field of research and from the community more generally (Russell 1984a, p. 8).

For Sanson and Wise, a shift in cultural norms has meant more opportunities for fathers to participate, and the removal, or at least the softening, of attitudes denying
fathers’ competences in caring for their children (Sanson and Wise 2001; see Russell 1982b; Russell 1984b for a critique of such attitudes).

Shared parenting does not necessarily mean equally shared parenting. Russell found that mothers in shared parenting families still did more child care than fathers when both parents were present, and that they tended to take over from the father when they (the mothers) came home from work (Russell 1982a, p. 152). Moreover, mothers tended to have more responsibility for the overall management of the child care, and ‘for planning, monitoring, and anticipating the needs of the children’ (Russell 1984a, p. 9). Deutsch concurred. She said that, even in families where fathers did an equal amount of child care (in the ‘equally shared parenting’ families she studied), mothers still did most of the organising in the majority of these families, as well as tasks ‘like buying clothes and arranging play dates’. Moreover, even when they worked in full-time paid employment, they still did 68 per cent to 70 per cent of the housework (Deutsch 1999, p. 233, 253, fn. 8). Deutsch pointed out that not all fathers in the unequal families were ‘slackers’ who (as she put it) ‘resisted the work with a stunning array of indirect strategies’ (p. 62) such as ‘strategic incompetence, strategic use of praise, the adherence to inferior standards, and denial.’ (p. 74). Some were ‘helpers’, although the status of that ‘help’ was somewhat dubious to the extent that they waited for their wives to tell them what to do and how to do it, and left them with ‘the mental work of keeping track of what needs to be done, managing, and delegating’ (p. 251, fn. 2). Others were genuine sharers, although just not equal ones.

Deutsch found that equally shared parenting had to be negotiated, not by way of rational discussion, but by ‘muddling through, adjusting as they go’, and by being flexible (Deutsch 1999, p. 20). She acknowledged ‘the ubiquity and persistence of gender inequality, and the forces and dynamics that sustain it’ (p. 5), of families where the husband ‘fits parenting around his work life’ while the wife ‘fits her work life around parenting’ (p. 40), where ‘women continued to work full time while juggling the majority of family responsibilities’ or where they gave up the struggle and reverted to traditional roles (p. 39). She said that women needed to develop a sense of entitlement, to demand respect for the work they do, and to learn to stand up for themselves (pp. 63–4). She gave the example of one woman who said: ‘I stopped cleaning up after him’ (p. 62). But even more important was power, she said. The women in the equally sharing families were women whose husbands were more attached to their wives than their wives were to them, or who wanted children more than their wives did, or a career less (pp. 65–6). The ‘trajectory towards traditionalism is not inevitable’, she argued (p. 5). After all, that too is negotiated: ‘The unequal families continually grapple with the question of how much participation from the father is enough’. Although the women in these families are not struggling for equality, they do ‘struggle over how much inequality will prevail’ while trying to get their husbands to do more (p. 49). Hence, despite the fact that inequality at home is still the dominant paradigm, she was optimistic about the future of ‘gender equality’, given that ‘real husbands and wives are already transforming the family’ (p. 224).
Shared parenting is not, however, a panacea. Russell delineated some of the difficulties uncovered in his study (Russell 1984a, p. 10). He had found that fathers did not always cope with ‘the constancy and demands of child care’ and that sometimes strained their relationships with their children. He said that there were some fathers who had trouble valuing what they were doing positively, while others experienced problems with the attitudes of other men who were ‘often openly critical or sarcastic’. There were others who worried about their status at work when they had to give priority to family rather than to work commitments. Mothers in shared caregiving households also reported difficulties—guilt about not being with their children, worry about reduced contact with and influence over their children and about whether or not the children loved them anymore, and jealousy of the children’s relationship with their father. There was also tension sometimes between the parents about who had responsibility for what.

One of the major consequences of shared parenting is its effect on parents’ careers. In the case of women, it is generally recognised that shared parenting has a favourable effect. If women do not have to carry the whole burden of child-rearing, they are more likely to be able to work full-time. This does not mean, however, that the mothers in shared parenting families took on typical masculine career paths. Russell found only two mothers in his sample of 250 ‘who had hours of employment and job demands (travel, overtime, etc.) comparable to what is commonly found for men in traditional families’ (Russell 1982b, p. 147). In the case of men, shared parenting can have an adverse effect, at least on high-powered careers, because of the incompatibility between family life and success in the labour market. As Deutsch has pointed out, long working hours, relocations, subordinating family to work, shielding work from the demands of family life, are all standard requirements of conventional careers, while the years of most intense career building are also the years of childbearing. ‘Is it any wonder’, she asks, ‘that careers are gendered?’ (Deutsch 1999, p. 232). She pointed out that adjustments to enable equal parenting ‘meant that neither [parent] had a conventional male career’ (p. 233). In her study, the equally sharing fathers had given up ‘the unchecked pursuit of career success’ (p. 202). Russell said that many of the couples he studied either ‘changed their jobs, hours of work, or reduced their career aspirations to allow them to share the parenting’ (Russell 1984a, p. 11). Hence, it is clear that men who want to involve themselves in equal parenting have to make a choice, and one that has been conventionally seen as a woman’s choice, that is, between children and career. It is, however, a choice that some men are prepared to make. Interestingly, Radin and Sagi found in their study of childrearing fathers in the US that ‘there appears to be an economic cost to the father of high involvement in child care’, although this was confined to fathers of sons. The authors did not know whether this meant that fathers expended less effort on their careers in order to spend more time with their sons, or whether it meant that fathers in lower socio-economic groups were more likely than higher status fathers to spend time with sons (Radin and Sagi 1982, p. 132). They did not ask why sons and not daughters.
2.4 Why businesses have become interested in work-family balance

Another argument in favour of family-friendly workplace provisions is that they are good for business (Wolcott and Glezer 1995, pp. 17–19; Levine and Pittinsky 1997). The UK Department of Trade and Industry summarised the benefits thus: ‘The economy needs a flexible labour market. Our participation and skills deficit can be improved if more parents choose to work. More flexible working opportunities, and the opportunity for parents to spend time with children, are important to reducing stress and absenteeism. There are benefits to individual employers and the economy as a whole if the needs of employers and parents can be brought closer together’ (UK Department of Trade and Industry 2000, ch. 2, pt 26).

Companies prosper, it is argued, with the introduction of workplace measures that take into consideration people’s need to care for their families. ‘Evidence is mounting’, Saltzman and Wiener said in 1993, ‘that companies whose family-friendliness is real can make shareholders happy, too’ (Saltzman and Wiener 1993). Among the benefits to firms are reduced turnover and lower rates of absenteeism (Foegen 1994; Scharlach and Grosswald 1997; Eironline 1998). Even during the 1980s, the importance of people’s family responsibilities was being recognised by employers: ‘If an employee is valued, the employers usually work out a parental leave plan to guarantee their return to the job…This is believed to be in the best interests of the company, since key personnel are difficult to get and keep’ (Bower 1988). According to the personnel officer of North British Housing Association, one of the winners of the 1995 Parents at Work Awards, family friendliness ‘means we retain trained staff…it means staff don’t have to leave after they have a baby; and it allows staff to get through difficult or unusual periods in their lives’ (Crabb 1995). And a spokeswoman for Patagonia, Inc., one of the most family-friendly firms in the US, said, ‘Our retention rate for employees is almost 100 per cent. No one ever wants to leave our firm once they are hired’ (Hammond 2000).

Family-friendliness also leads to improved productivity (Saltzman and Wiener 1993; Foegen 1994; Scharlach and Grosswald 1997; Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999; Eironline 1998). The usual reason given for this is that work-family programs improve employee morale by easing parents’ worries about their children: ‘parents need not worry about leaving the office early to pick up their kids, and they can work uninterrupted in knowing that their kids are receiving quality care’ (Hammond 2000). As one commentator noted, ‘retaining a workforce means keeping employees happy’ (Cohen 1991; see also Commonwealth of Australia 1991, pp. 19-20).

It has also been suggested that family-friendly firms attract ‘a higher-quality work force’ (Saltzman and Wiener 1993; See also Scharlach and Grosswald 1997). Highly skilled people, it is argued, can afford to pick and choose among employers. Cunningham comments in relation to law firms in the US, ‘Many of today’s law school
graduates make employment decisions based not only on salary but also on quality-of-life considerations, such as a firm’s personnel policies and work atmosphere… Firms openly state that recruitment and retention of associates are among their primary business goals. To that end, law firms have instituted a wide set of policies to make the workplace more “family friendly” (Cunningham 2001). Cohen points out that a lack of ‘concern…about the family and individual needs of the employee may cost the company a good job candidate. Job candidates now have more than just money on their agenda…And the same goes for those already in a job’ (Cohen 1991).

The personnel officer of North British Housing Association said, ‘it helps to recruit from a wider range of applicants’ (Crabb 1995); while management of Swedish companies argue that their practice of making up most of the difference between government benefits for paternity leave and male salaries is good business. ‘We want to be an attractive employer’, they say (Sains 2001).

Despite employer fears, it would seem that costs are minimal. Glezer mentions that those eligible for leave are a small proportion of the workforce (Glezer 1990, p. 25); while Haas cites a 1983 finding that only 1.4 per cent of workers are off work on parental leave at any one time (Haas 1992, p. 99).

Moreover, it appears that family-friendliness can lead to increased savings. This should be obvious if it is true that it brings greater productivity. But there is also the issue of the costs involved in training new staff, costs which are reduced to the extent that the old staff are retained. As the spokeswoman for Patagonia, Inc. put it, “It takes a lot of money to train an employee to work at our company, so why not keep them happy so they will stay? We figure we save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year solely because we only have to train a limited number of people due to our retirement rate” (Hammond 2000). The UK Department of Trade and Industry gave the example of one company that ‘found that the cost of its child care allowance was more than offset by the replacement costs it would otherwise have faced and that it retained key employees who might have defected to competitors’. It also mentioned another small company that ‘identified six people they had persuaded to stay at a saving of £45 000’ (UK Department of Trade and Industry 2000, ch. 2, pt. 20). Earle cites the case of the financial services firm AMP that estimated it had a four-fold return on its investment in family-friendly policies as a result of lower staff turnover and higher productivity (Earle 2002, p. 13).

Haas and Hwang found in their survey of the 200 largest Swedish companies that some companies had discovered unexpected benefits in their male staff taking parental leave. Men often returned from leave with increased competence, including, the authors said, ‘enhanced ability to balance multiple tasks, deal with the unknown and unexpected, tolerate interruptions, develop social relations, handle stress and learn something new’. Even the arrangements companies made as a result of employees’ temporary absences often had advantages, by enabling more flexible
workforce arrangements and the development of the skills of other employees (Haas and Hwang 2000, p. 26).

For all these reasons, it is argued, firms that introduce family-friendly policies have a competitive edge. ‘Companies’ it is said, ‘can no longer sit by the wayside and let their competitors outdo them in terms of benefits, perks and incentives’ (Cohen 1991).

As a number of researchers have found, however, acceptance of the business case for family-friendly policies is by no means universal. Whitehouse and Zetlin found, for example, that firms varied considerably in their commitment to family-friendliness, (Whitehouse and Zetlin 1999; Earle 2002). They also found there were large variations in the extent to which even employees in the same organisation had access to family-friendly provisions, a finding that was substantiated by the empirical component of this present research (see sections 7.2 and 13.2) (See also: Gray and Tudball 2002).

Whitehouse and Zetlin observed that there were a number of reasons for this variability, from market pressures to management style, and not simply the level of formal policies provided by the organisation. Even where provision of work-family initiatives was good, the policies were only moderately successful in enabling employees to balance work and family. The main reason for this, these authors found, was employee insecurity about job tenure in the wake of restructuring and staff retrenchments.

2.5 Issues concerning the public provision of child care

Another reason for the increasing interest in work-family policies is the current insufficiency of provision for out-of-home child care. This is particularly a problem in the US where there has not been a national policy on child care since World War II (and only then because of the exceptional situation of the war-time need for women’s labour). Cook pointed out at the end of the 1980s that the gap created by Australian Government inaction had only partly been filled by alternative means. These, she said, fell far short of meeting families’ needs, even those of the comparatively well-off, not to mention the poor and single mother families (Cook 1989). Bruce Bower concurred, commenting that ‘daycare placement of infants currently is risky’ because there is no quality control (Bower 1988). Cook links this situation with initiatives on the part of child care advocates to institute programs of ‘extended maternity (or more recently, parental) leave, covering several months to years after birth’ (Cook 1989). But the problem is not confined to the US. Kamerman tells us that, in Europe, ‘shortages have remained in the supply of infant and toddler care right up to the present’, and that as a consequence, one of the major trends ‘in the 1980s and 1990s has been to extend the leave policy to create a real alternative to out-of-home infant care’, with parental leaves increasingly substituting for out-of-home infant and toddler care (Kamerman 2000).

It would seem, then, that social policies concerned with the care of children are following the same worldwide trend as social policy in other areas—away from public
funding and provision, and towards ‘privatisation’ (Kamerman and Kahn 1989), in this case, within the domestic sphere of the nuclear family with the responsibility for the care of children widened slightly to include fathers (for short periods of time). In France and Finland, for example, Heinen and Martiskainen de Koenigswarter point out that the 1970s concern with publicly funded child care has been replaced with an emphasis on cash benefits to parents under the rhetoric of ‘parental choice’, and that these two countries have been at the forefront of the shift from public child care to care by women at home (Heinen and Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001, p. 172, 175). But if it is the case that children are a public good, as Nancy Folbre (1994) has argued, and as the concern with ‘ageing populations’ in the developed nations would appear to indicate, this reassertion of a private, domestic responsibility for the care of children needs to be approached with some caution. As McDonald has put it, ‘policies need to give explicit recognition to the fact that children are valuable to the whole society, not just to their parents’ (McDonald 1997, p. 21).

2.6 ‘Gender equity’

Yet another reason for the increasing interest in men’s involvement with child care is what is commonly referred to as ‘gender equity’ (Haas, Hwang and Russell 2000). Kamerman mentions the making of family leave policy into ‘a stronger instrument of gender equity’ as another of the major trends in the 1980s and 1990s (Kamerman 2000). Uses of the term ‘gender’, however, tend to be ambiguous. Sometimes it means women’s equality with men, and sometimes it means men’s equality with women. When what is at issue is women’s equality with men, the greater involvement of fathers with their children is seen as a contribution towards easing the difficulties women have in participating in the paid workforce to the same extent men do. The Swedish Government’s 1968 report on The Status of Women in Sweden, for example, said: ‘The goal for a long-range program of “women’s rights” must be that every individual, regardless of sex, shall have the same opportunities not only for education and employment but also fundamentally the same responsibility for child upbringing and housework’ (Liljestrom 1978). One participant in the Beijing+5 Conference said, ‘Shared parental leave allows women to further their careers despite having families’, while going on to quote the Swedish Minister for Gender Equality, Margareta Winberg, saying ‘“Thousands of women in Sweden want to break the male role, want to break the male structures”’ (Venkataraman 2000).

The Australian Institute of Family Studies sees the ‘gender equity’ aspect of paternity leave working both ways. On the one hand, they feel that ‘men should be entitled to share…responsibility [for parenting] if they choose to do so’; while on the other, they feel that men’s involvement in caring for children will ‘help women to combine child-rearing and workforce participation’ (Glezer 1990, p. 24). Haas also saw the equity issue in this way. She said that the aim of the Swedish parental leave policy is ‘to
promote both parents' involvement in parenting and in the labour force, so that equality between the sexes can be realized' (Haas 1992, p. 56).

Carlsen tells us that the equal status argument in Denmark stemmed from employer perceptions of women taking maternity leave as 'difficult'. If men, too, took leave, women would be less stigmatised for taking it (Carlsen 1995, p. 53).

On other occasions, however, ‘gender equity’ in the context of discussions of men caring for children means men's equality with women. The implication is that women have something valuable that men lack, and that men therefore have a right to it as well. This meaning of ‘gender equity’ has been made explicit in the US. Kiechel, for example, commented in 1986 that ‘many companies offer paternity leave only for legal reasons’, that is, they feared being sued for sex discrimination if they didn't provide men with the same entitlements as were provided for women by maternity leave (Kiechel 1986). Meiers also came to the conclusion that many companies offered paternity/parental leave to men only from fear of the legal sanctions if they did not.

In 1984, Catalyst (a non-profit research and advisory organisation in the US concerned with women's advancement in the corporate world) surveyed 384 of the 1500 largest US companies. The survey found that, in 41 per cent of the companies with policies offering leave to men, management believed that men ought not to take time off for family reasons despite the existence of these policies (Meiers 1988). In other words, management's commitment to gender equity in these companies was less than whole-hearted.

Corporate anxiety about sex discrimination suits was well-founded. In 1986, the US Supreme Court agreed to consider the claim ‘that a California law requiring employers to guarantee the jobs of women who take disability leave for childbirth for up to four months discriminates against men’ (Brophy 1986). In 1993, the US Equal Employment Opportunities Commission found that a parental leave policy which allowed women more time off than men to care for a new-born child was discriminatory (Hammond 2000). This potential for complaints by men of employment discrimination on the grounds of ‘gender’ is recognised in the US Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (Rasnic 1994).

But even where it is not made explicit, the focus on men ensures that the ‘gender’ whose ‘equity’ is at issue will be the masculine one. ‘Gender equity…is clearly being incorporated in the policies of a growing number of countries in the context of involving fathers more in parenting’ (Kamerman 2000). This focus on men is not in itself a problem—men caring for children can be in women's interests too. The problem is couching the issue in terms of ‘equity’ at all, given the nature of the inequalities involved. It doesn’t make much sense to talk about men being ‘unequal’ in relation to women, since the societal disadvantages are all on the women's side. There can be occasions when men are disadvantaged in relation to women, but women's greater involvement in child care is not one of them. On the contrary, caring for children brings
with it so many social disadvantages, in loss of income, reduced career advancement, social isolation, etc., it would hardly be surprising if men were reluctant to assume parental responsibilities to the same extent women do. Nonetheless, caring for children is also a worthwhile activity, for men as well as women.

2.7 Falling fertility

It has recently been suggested that this issue of gender equity is at the centre of concerns about falling rates of fertility in the rich industrialised nations of the West. McDonald has argued that low rates of fertility are to be found in countries where there are conflicting expectations of women from ‘individual-oriented social institutions’ such as education and the market on the one hand, and from ‘family-oriented social institutions’ on the other. If women find that having children restricts the opportunities open to them in education and employment, then it would seem that a significant proportion of them either don’t have children or have fewer children than they might have had. This hypothesis was suggested by the initially paradoxical fact that the countries with the lowest fertility rates were those attaching the highest importance to family. The paradox is explained, however, when it is realised that these are also the countries with more conservative attitudes towards women, especially mothers, and where government policies in relation to family services, taxation and industrial relations make it difficult for mothers to take up paid work (McDonald 1997, pp. 3–4; McDonald 2000). McDonald points out that ‘gender inequity is still prevalent in all countries’ but that there has been more change in the direction of equity in some countries than others (McDonald 1997, p. 10). In those countries where the most progress has been made towards women’s equality, fertility rates tend to be higher.

Encouraging family-friendly policies in the workplace and an emphasis on fathers’ involvement in child-rearing may become more important as part of the response to concern with low fertility. Although Australia is not one of those countries with the lowest levels of fertility, its rate is below replacement. The literature indicates that easing women’s workforce participation could lead to higher fertility. ‘Fertility tends to be higher’, said McDonald, ‘in countries which provide more family-friendly working conditions’ (McDonald 1997, p. 13; Barnes 2001, p. 17).
Increasing interest in men's involvement in child care
3 Family-friendly practices

3.1 National policies on parental leave

Without a lengthy research project (that is beyond the scope of this review), it is not possible to give a detailed account of parental leave policies in many countries. Policies change so rapidly that published information very quickly gets out of date, while the information on government websites is often sparse and legislation is rarely translated into English. Nonetheless, there is some information available, notably about the Nordic countries which have been leaders in this area.

**OECD countries**

Most OECD countries make statutory provision for paid leave for family purposes. Switzerland has no provision at the national level, but there is coverage at the canton (i.e. ‘state’) level. The US, Australia and South Korea are the only OECD countries which make no statutory provision at the national level for paid leave (Kamerman 2000). Most OECD countries, along with all the countries in the European Union (EU), have also extended their leave policies in the recent past, while at the same time changing them from exclusively maternity policies into parental or family policies (Kamerman 2000; Commonwealth of Australia 1991, p. 37).

In 16 of the OECD countries, the benefit paid while on leave either replaces between 70 per cent and 100 per cent of income prior to the leave being taken, or provides the maximum covered under social insurance. In another seven countries, the benefit replaces between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of prior income. Paternity leave is more likely than maternity leave to be paid at the full rate of income, but it also tends to be for much shorter periods of time (Kamerman 2000).

As well as paid maternity leave and family leave in general, paid paternity leave is provided for in eight European countries: Austria (six months); Belgium (three days); Denmark (10 days); Finland (one week); France (three days—two weeks from January 2002); Norway (two weeks); Spain (two days); and Sweden (two weeks). Sweden and Norway recently extended their paid parental leaves, while requiring that at least one month of the extension be taken up by the father without the option of transferring it to the mother (Kamerman 2000).

**Europe**

Since 1998, Member States of the EU have been obliged, under a 1996 directive of the European Council, to make legislative provision for a leave of at least three months to enable a parent to care for a child (except for the UK which had a special status allowing them to veto social legislation—Aldred 1994). Beyond that, countries vary in the statutory entitlement, the amount and duration of payment available, and the
Family-friendly practices

flexibility of the arrangements (Plantenga and Hansen 1999; European Union 1996). The Scandinavian countries have taken the lead in this, followed by other Nordic countries (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999), with ‘the development of parental leave schemes [being] the most important area of expansion of welfare politics during the 1990s’ (Brandth and Kvande 2001, p. 251).

Because of the important role played by the Nordic countries in introducing statutory requirements for the provision of leave to care for children, most of what follows discusses the policies in these countries, although information on other countries has been included as it came to hand. The situations in the UK and US, as the major Anglophone countries most closely related to Australia, are also discussed. But the situation in Australia (and in the US, New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, the UK) stands in stark contrast to what is happening in other advanced industrialised countries.

Sweden

In March 2001, the Swedish Parliament made a number of amendments to the legislation on parental leave and benefits. One important aspect of those amendments is that the period of paid leave will be extended by another 30 days, to a total of 13 months. Two months are to be reserved for each parent and hence not transferable to the other. These changes will come into force on 1 January 2002 (European Commission 2001).

As Alice Cook has said, ‘Sweden took the lead in including the male spouse in family caretaking’ (Cook 1989). It was in Sweden that a parental leave was first introduced which would allow leave to be taken by either parent (Core and Koutsogeorgopoulou 1995; Eydal 2001). The Swedish Parent Insurance benefit was first established in 1974 (Liljestrom 1978), and has been amended several times since then. In 1978, two types of parental leave were distinguished: ‘regular’ parental leave involving full-time care and available until the child turns eight; and ‘temporary’ leave for short-term purposes, e.g. a child’s sickness, doctor’s appointments, school functions (Haas 1992, p. 60; Haas and Hwang 2000, p. 18). Currently, the Swedish system provides for that time, the 12 months parental leave (13 months from January 2002), to be taken by either parent, but at least one month must be taken by the father or forfeited (two months from 1 January 2002). This four-week quota solely for fathers was introduced in 1995, in response to what Joan Eveline refers to as ‘the tardiness of Swedish men in moving to a more equal share in the time spent with children’ (Eveline 1999). For the first year (13 months from 1 January 2002), the benefit is paid at 80 per cent of prior income with a specified upper limit beyond which it does not increase. The next three months of the 18 months are paid at a low flat rate, while the final three months are unpaid (Clearinghouse 2001).

The month that must be taken by the father is referred to as the ‘father quota’, ‘daddy leave’ or ‘daddy month’ (Bergman and Hobson 2002, pp. 108–9). It is intended to ‘project a new image of fatherhood and encourage shared parenting’ (Leira 1998, p.
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

363). It can be taken at any time before the child turns eight, although it is usually taken in the first year. Neither parent is required to take the leave in one block. They can also take it by working a reduced number of hours (Father and Child 2001), up to 25 per cent off their normal working hours although they are paid only for the actual time they work once their period of leave entitlement has expired (Kamerman 2000).

As Kamerman has put it, ‘The Swedish Parental Leave and Parent Insurance policy is the exemplar for advocates of parental leaves—and of gender equity. It is comprehensive, generous, and flexible’. She also points out that the policy was not seriously cut back during the economic problems of the mid-1990s (Kamerman 2000).

**Norway**

Norway was the next country to introduce paternity/parental leave, in 1977. At that time, maternity leave was 18 weeks, the last 12 of which could be shared between the parents, and all of which was paid at 90 per cent of prior wages (Ve Hendriksen and Holter 1978). Currently, three weeks leave before the estimated date of birth and six weeks after are reserved for the mother. Fathers can take two weeks of unpaid paternity leave at the time of the birth. Leira says that this paternity leave was an instant success, despite the fact that it was unpaid, although men’s take-up of the longer parental leave remains low (Leira 1998, pp. 369–70; Leira 1997, pp. 229–30). Parental leave can be taken either for 52 weeks at 80 per cent of prior income, or for 42 weeks at 100 per cent, and parents can divide up the leave and the benefit between themselves. There is, however, a limit to wage replacement, a factor which may help to explain men’s low take-up (Leira 1998, p. 370). In 1993, two years earlier than Sweden, Norway introduced a ‘father quota’ of four weeks of the paid parental leave reserved solely for men. (This was in addition to the two week unpaid paternity leave). The reasoning behind this, according to Brandth and Kvande, is that fathers had an obligation to take leave to care for their children (Brandth and Kvande 2001, p. 252).

Norway also has a scheme called ‘Time Account’, introduced in 1994. This involves the same amount of leave being stretched over a longer time (Brandth and Kvande 2001, p. 256). It allows parents to use their parental leave to work between 50 per cent and 90 per cent of their normal working hours. However, in the Norwegian case, parents can still receive the equivalent of full pay even beyond the period of parental leave, up until the child is two (Clearinghouse 2001). Brandth and Kvande point out that the father’s right is a derived one, it depends on the child’s mother having worked for the amount of time required for her to receive her own leave entitlements. Men cannot claim parental or paternity leave if the mother of their child is not in paid employment. The authors point out that ‘the state risks having to pay for persons who do not have the real care of the child’, if the right to paid leave is given to fathers whose partners are not in paid employment (Brandth and Kvande 2001, p. 257).
Denmark

In December 2000, the Danish government passed the Consolidation Act on Benefits in the Event of Illness or Childbirth, effective from 1 January 2002, that provided for daily cash benefits payable by the local authority to those who are employed and self-employed, in connection with pregnancy, maternity or adoption (as well as illness). The amount of benefit payable is calculated on the basis of the employee’s social security contributions or, if that information is not available, the average income during the four weeks prior to the leave. The Act specifies an upper limit for payment, to be adjusted on 1 January each year. Benefits are payable for up to 26 weeks after childbirth. The first 14 weeks are reserved for the mother, and during this time the father can take two weeks paid leave. During the next 10 weeks, either parent can receive benefits, but not both at once. At the end of the twenty-fourth week, the father is eligible for benefit for a further two weeks. There is also provision for the father to work part-time after the first two weeks after childbirth. Employers who pay wages or salary while the employee is on leave are entitled to reimbursement from the local authority.

Parents who have to give up paid employment, either in full or in part, due to the serious illness of a child under the age of 14, are also eligible for benefits from the local authority. It is a condition that the child’s illness requires a stay of 25 days or more in hospital or another institution, including being kept at home (Danish Government 2000; Danish Ministry of Social Affairs 2001).

Iceland

In 1997, the Icelandic Parliament enacted a resolution which emphasised the importance of fathers taking parental leave (among other things) (Clearinghouse 2001; Nordic Council and Council of Ministers 2000). In the interests of encouraging this, the government passed the Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave (No.95/2000) in the 1999–2000 session of parliament, to take effect from 1 January 2001.

The Act applies to both employed and self-employed parents, as well as to those ‘not active in the labour market’ and those in full-time education. Its aims are to ‘ensure children’s access to both their fathers and mothers’ and ‘to enable both women and men to co-ordinate family life and work outside the home’. A Maternity/Paternity Leave Fund, financed by an insurance levy and interest on the Fund’s deposits, funds the leave. It provides for an independent right for both mother and father of three months leave (the father’s independent right to paternity leave being phased in—one month as of 1 January 2001, two months as of 1 January 2002, and three months as of 1 January 2003). These three months are not assignable to the other parent, and the mother must take the first two weeks after the child’s birth. Further, the parents have a joint right to a further three months that may be taken by one parent only or divided between them. It is the parents’ right to decide how they will take the leave, whether
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

‘in one continuous period’, in shorter periods (although not less than a week), or by a reduction in working hours.

Parents are eligible for payment from the Fund after six months employment and entitled to 80 per cent of average wages over the prior 12 months, or of income for which an insurance levy has been paid in the case of the self-employed. According to the Icelandic Minister of Social Affairs, this was intended to do away with the inequality of the prior situation whereby only some workers were entitled to payments linked to their salaries, the other being entitled only to Social Insurance (Eydal 2001, p. 14). The Act specifies an amount received below which part-time workers shall not fall, as well as the amounts to be paid to those parents not in the labour force and those in full-time education. These amounts are to be reviewed yearly. The right to leave lapses once the child is 18 months old.

The Act also provides for 13 weeks unpaid parental leave each year for each parent until the child turns eight. Once again, each parent’s leave is not assignable to the other (Icelandic Government 2000).

Eydal points out that, although Iceland had lagged behind the other Nordic countries in providing benefits to working parents, the latest legislative changes mean that it is now ahead as far as fathers’ independent right to paternity leave is concerned (Eydal 2001, p. 8).

Finland

In April 1998, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a Committee on Fatherhood to ‘evaluate the status of Finnish fathers in the various sectors of society, from the perspectives of both legislation and current practices’ (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999). What follows is largely based on that document.

The right to paternity leave came into force in Finland in 1978. During the 1990s, the system of parental allowance was amended to make it more compatible for fathers. The system allows for 158 weekdays of paid parental leave—the parental allowance—which starts immediately after the mother’s 105 days of maternity leave—the maternity allowance. In both cases, the allowance is approximately 67 per cent of average prior earnings, and is available to either parent, but not to both at the same time. Those who have no earned income are paid a basic daily allowance. There are two paid paternity leave periods—six to 12 days during the maternity allowance period, i.e. close to the birth, and six days which can be taken during either the maternity allowance period or the parental allowance period. This paternity allowance is independent of the mother’s situation and income.

In addition, parents of children under three have the right to take job-protected, although unpaid, leave to care for their child at home. They cannot both take this leave at the same time, but a period of unpaid leave can be taken at the same time as the
other parent is on maternity or parental leave. This would enable a father, for example, to take leave to care for an older child while the mother is on maternity leave. There is also statutory provision for a four-day temporary leave when a child under ten years of age falls ill suddenly, and some collective labour contracts provide for paid leave for caring for a sick child.

According to the Committee on Fatherhood, part-time work to enable a parent to care for children is little used in Finland, largely because part-time work is fairly rare. In 1997, only 11 per cent of the Finnish labour force was employed part-time, compared with a figure of 20 per cent in many other industrialised countries. It is also more common for Finnish women to work full-time than women in other European countries. Moreover, Finnish workers have found that it is very difficult to reduce their workloads to a level that would allow them to work part-time (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999. See also: Heinen and Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001).

According to Finland's National Action Plan for Employment, the Government intends to make paternity leave more flexible from 1 October 2001. There will also be a study undertaken to investigate the possibility of introducing a separate one-month parental leave for fathers, and of maternity and parental leave as part-time leave. It will also investigate ways of redistributing the costs of parental leave incurred by employers (Finnish Government 2001, p. 30).

Italy

In March 2000, a revision of the Italian parental leave policy explicitly recognised the role of the father. Both parents can now take a total of 10 months parental leave (or 11 months if the father takes more than two months in a row). This is in addition to the mandatory maternity leave for three months after birth. (Paid maternity leave was first introduced in 1912.) Six of the 10 months are paid at 30 per cent of prior earnings, and can be taken until the child's third birthday. The remaining four months are unpaid (except for low-income families), and can be taken at any time up until the child's eighth birthday. Parents also have the right to take unlimited, although unpaid, job-protected sick leave to care for an ill child under the age of three (Clearinghouse 2001).

Portugal

In 1995, Portugal's maternity benefit legislation (which dates from 1984) was substantially improved to provide for a six-month maternity leave, paid at 100 per cent of the mother's wage. Two months must be taken immediately after the child's birth. The father can take all but 14 days of the six months leave, either by arrangement with the child's mother or where the mother is incapacitated. There is provision for unpaid parental leave which must be taken full-time—six months in the case of one child, two years for two children, and three years for three children (Clearinghouse 2001). There is provision for two days paternity leave (Eironline 1999).
In May 1999, the Portuguese Parliament proposed new legislation aimed to transpose the 1996 EU Directive on parental leave into Portuguese law. The proposed legislation would widen the conditions for maternity leave, previously restricted to nursing mothers (with the exceptions mentioned above), to include infant care in general and hence to become parental leave, in order to make it easier for fathers to be defined as care providers. It also allowed for either parent to work part-time for six months (Eironline 1999).³

**Austria**

Austria’s maternity and parental leaves and benefits are fairly generous in comparison with other EU countries (Clearinghouse 2001; Plantenga and Hansen 1999). It introduced paid maternity leave (for up to one year after childbirth) soon after World War II (Cook 1989). Currently, it provides up to two years of paid leave through the unemployment insurance system, although at a fairly low level of remuneration. The last six months are paid only if the leave is taken by the father (Kamerman 2000).

**France**

French law provides for three days paid paternity leave that is not transferable to the mother. It must be taken either during the fortnight before the birth (or adoption) or during the fortnight after, and can be taken either all at once or on separate days. At the annual *Conference on the Family*, held on 11 June 2001, the French Government announced that paternity leave would be extended from three days to two weeks.⁴ The legislation would be effective from January 2002. Fathers will receive 80 per cent of their gross pay (up to a ceiling). The scheme will be funded by the family allowance branch of the social security system (Eironline 2001a; *Time International* 2001).

**Germany**

Since January 2001, both parents have been eligible for paternity/maternity leave until the child is three years old.⁵ All companies with more than 15 employees are required to give both the father and mother the right to work a 30-hour-week part-time job (*Time International* 2001).

**United Kingdom**

Because of that special status which allowed the UK to veto social legislation, the 1996 EU directive on parental leave did not apply there. However, entitlement to unpaid paternity leave was introduced on 15 December 1999, when the *Employment Relations Act* took effect. This Act provided for parental leave of 13 weeks, to be taken within five years of the birth of the child (Johansson 2000).

In December 2000, the UK Department of Trade and Industry published a Green Paper reviewing family-friendly legislation and making a number of recommendations, including provision for parents to divide any extension of the existing unpaid leave
between them, and the introduction of two weeks' paid paternity leave (Dibb Lupton Alsop 2001a; UK Department of Trade and Industry 2000). In the UK Budget in March 2001, two weeks' paid paternity leave was introduced, and came into force on 1 May (Dibb Lupton Alsop 2001b; see also UK Department of Trade and Industry 2001).

An annual employment trends survey carried out by the Confederation of British Industry in March and April 2001 found that, of the 673 private sector employers surveyed, 41 per cent offered paid paternity leave and 39 per cent offered paid parental leave (only 14 per cent had offered paid parental leave in 2000) (Eironline 2001b).

The United States

In 1993, the US Congress passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that 'mandates that public and private employers with at least fifty workers provide their employees with...12 weeks of unpaid leave for the care of a newborn or newly adopted child, for the care of a family member with a serious medical condition, or for their own illness. It also requires employers to maintain health insurance coverage and job protection for the duration of the leave' (Clinton 1993). This was the first federal law to address family leave (although the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 required firms to treat pregnancy like a temporary disability if they already had disability programs) (Waldfogel 1999). An earlier bill containing similar provisions to those of the FMLA (18 weeks instead of 12) (Levine 1987), had been debated in Congress in 1987, but had failed to pass (Cook 1989); while two other bills had been vetoed in 1990 and 1992 (Rasnic 1994).

Prior to the passage of the FMLA, entitlement to family/parental leave was either a matter for individual firms or for state legislation. The Catalyst survey found that about a third of the companies gave men some paternity leave without pay, up from 8.6 per cent in 1980 (Fortune 1984; Brophy 1986). A survey of 1026 major US companies conducted in 1992 by Hewitt Associates of Lincolnshire, Illinois, found that 63 per cent of large employers offered parental leave, 97 per cent of them offering unpaid leave, and 3 per cent paid (Mergenbagen 1994).

State legislation is still an important source of coverage for workers in small firms not covered by the Act (Waldfogel 1999). By 1987, three states had passed laws requiring both private and state employers to provide unpaid parental leave, and there were another 30 states which were considering adopting such laws (Cook 1989). By 1993, 35 states had mandated unpaid work leave in some form, although most applied only to the public sector (Rasnic 1994).

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) began collecting figures in its employee benefits surveys on such family-friendly issues as flexible hours, voluntary part-time arrangements and parental leave policies in 1987 in response to employer demand (Saltzman 1988). From 1988 to 1991, the percentage of full-time employees of medium and large private firms who were covered by parental leave policies hardly changed.
The 1988 survey found that 36 per cent were covered by maternity leave policies, and 17 per cent by paternity leave policies (Meisenheimer 1989); the 1989 survey found 37 per cent and 18 per cent respectively (Cooley 1990. See also: Stanton 1990; Foegen 1994); while the 1990-91 survey found 24 per cent and 15 per cent (Levine 1993). Most were unpaid, with only 2 per cent of employees covered by paid maternity leave, and only 1 per cent by paid paternity leave. The 1992 BLS survey found that in small firms (fewer than 100 workers), only 18 per cent of full-time employees had maternity leave and 8 per cent had paternity leave, both unpaid (Mergenbagen 1994).

After the passing of the FMLA, family leave coverage increased, especially paternity leave. This was contrary to the expectation that it would have little effect because so many workers were either excluded or already covered by state legislation and company policies. A study was conducted in 1995 by Westat Inc. for the Commission on Family and Medical Leave (established under the Act to evaluate its effects). It found that private sector employer compliance with the Act had grown since 1993 (Scharlach and Grosswald 1997), that two-thirds of firms said that they had had to change their policies, and that the most frequently mentioned change (69 per cent) was the introduction of leave for fathers (Waldfogel 1999). It also found that one-third of private sector employers were still out of compliance, and many employees expressed anxiety about the consequences of taking leave (Scharlach and Grosswald 1997).

The FMLA has not been without its critics. Saltzman and Wiener pointed out that the fact that the leave was unpaid meant that many wage earners would not be able to afford it, and that its restriction to firms with 50 or more employees left more than a third of workers uncovered anyway. On the other hand, the legal requirement for the continuation of health benefits and the job guarantee were positive aspects of the law (Saltzman and Wiener 1993). Writing in 2000, Kamerman put the proportion of workers excluded from coverage by the Act at nearly one half—'only about 55 percent of the workforce is covered by the FMLA'. She contrasted the situation in the US with other advanced industrialised countries where almost all working parents were covered. She judged the FMLA ‘a modest policy’ and ‘a symbolic gesture’, saying it was far less generous than policies elsewhere and ‘in dramatic contrast to the policies that exist around the world and especially in our peer countries’ (Kamerman 2000).

### 3.2 Australia

As Alcorso has pointed out, ‘the industrial relations system has been particularly important in workers’ access to work-family provisions in Australia, providing a vehicle for entitlements that in other countries are often delivered through dedicated parental rights legislation and/or social security’ (Alcorso 2001). Parental leave first became part of the Australian industrial relations context in 1990 (as opposed to maternity leave which had been introduced in 1979) (Glezer 1988), when the Australian Council
of Trade Unions won its parental leave test case before Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) (Eveline 1999; Glezer 1990). This leave was, and continues to be, unpaid. The AIRC decision was in line with the ILO Convention 156 which had earlier been ratified by the Australian Government. Subsequently, the federal Industrial Relations Reform Act 1993 entitled all full-time and part-time employees in Australia (but not casual or seasonal employees) to unpaid parental leave totalling 52 weeks to care for a child in its first year. One week could be taken by both parents at once at the time of the birth. The rest could only be taken by one parent at a time, and only then if that particular parent could show that they were the child's primary caregiver. These provisions were included in the Workplace Relations Act 1996 (Schedule 14). In May 2001, a federal test case extended this entitlement to casual employees who had been working for the same employer for 12 months. NSW and Queensland had already done so in the preceding two years (Alcorso 2001).

As well as parental leave, there are other types of leave that either parent can use for family care purposes, namely personal/carer's leave, portions of annual leave, unpaid leave, time-in-lieu and rostered days off. Provisions for these forms of leave have also been included in awards, agreements, etc. as a result of a series of industrial test cases, commencing with the federal Personal/Carer's Leave Test Case in 1994. Unlike parental leave, which is a recent innovation in the Australian industrial relations context, provision for personal/carer's leave is an extension of a pre-existing award right to sick and bereavement leave. The basic entitlement is a maximum of five days. In October 2000, 75 per cent of the most commonly used federal awards provided for personal/carer's leave (Alcorso 2001).

In Australia, there are three types of registered industrial instruments which specify terms and conditions of employment, including access to parental leave: awards (which regulate the terms and conditions across sections of industry or occupation and are legally binding); Certified Agreements; and Australian Workplace Agreements (AWA). Both of these latter forms of agreement operate at the enterprise level, Certified Agreements being those collectively covering groups of employees, and AWA being negotiated between employer and individual employee. Collective agreements currently cover some 35 per cent of Australian employees, while AWA (individual agreements) cover a further 1.8 per cent (Alcorso 2001).

Table 2 shows that, in 1998–99, paid paternity leave was included in 2 per cent of federal collective agreements, and applied to 15 per cent of employees covered by these agreements. The most prevalent form of family-related leave was family/carer's leave. It was included in 28 per cent of agreements, although it applied to over half of the employees covered. The next most common form of leave was 'other leave for caring purposes', provided for in 21 per cent of agreements and covering 41 per cent of employees.
Table 2: Family-related leave provisions in federal collective agreements, 1998–99 average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>% of agreements</th>
<th>% of employees covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/carer’s leave</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid maternity leave</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid paternity leave</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid adoption leave</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended unpaid parental leave</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-52, career break</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to other leave for caring purposes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>13 064</td>
<td>1 551 772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Alcorso 2001; DEWRSB & OEA 2000: Workplace Agreements Database.

In individual agreements too, carer’s and associated leave are among the most frequently used provisions, although data on AWAs cannot be directly compared with the above data on collective agreements. Table 3 shows that 26 per cent of employees under AWAs had provisions more generous than their award. Paid paternity leave was available to 15 per cent of employees covered by AWAs.

Table 3: Family-related leave provisions in AWA, 1998–99 average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>% of employers</th>
<th>% of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sick/personal/carer’s leave(*)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid maternity leave</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid paternity leave</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended unpaid parental leave</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>81 932</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) Increased compared to award provisions
- Data not available

Source: Adapted from Alcorso 2001; DEWRSB & OEA 2000: AWA Management System and AWA Research Information System.

At the state level, about 14 per cent of Australian employees are covered by collective agreements, and 0.8 per cent by individual agreements (Alcorso 2001). The data in Table 4 refer to collective agreements commencing in 2000 from all states. Although employee coverage estimates are not available, again it is clear that family/carer’s leave is the most common leave provision in agreements.
Table 4: Family-related leave in registered state collective agreements (2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>% of agreements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/carer's leave(^{(a)})</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid maternity leave</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid paternity leave</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48-52</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career break</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(a)}\) Family/carer’s leave is defined here as any reference to one or more of: family/carer’s leave taken as part of or additional to sick leave; family/carer’s leave taken as part of other leave (eg annual, bereavement, RDO, TOIL); more than five days family/carer’s leave; employee may also be granted leave without pay, leave on half-pay, leave on reduced pay. It should be noted that this is a broader definition than that used for the WAD database and reported for federal agreements.


The Australian Workplace and Industrial Relations Survey conducted in 1995 found that there was greater provision of paid parental leave than was indicated by the workplace agreements, with paternity leave provided for by 13 per cent of private sector enterprises with more than 20 employees, and 31 per cent of such enterprises in the public sector. The average amount of paid leave, both maternity and paternity, was four weeks. It would seem, too, that private sector employers are increasingly keeping in touch with parents on leave, according to the Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Agency (Alcorso 2001; WFU 1999, p. 19).

Alcorso commented that the agreement-making process, whether collective or individual, has not been conducive to the provision of work-family measures, including leave for family purposes. Access to personal/carer’s leave is the most frequently found measure, but it is also reasonably widely available through the award system (although the agreement provisions may be more generous than those found in awards). Only 5 per cent of state, and 10 per cent of federal, agreements included paid maternity leave, while the incidence of other forms of paid leave was also relatively low. Access to unpaid parental leave has been spread fairly effectively across the workforce via the test case/award, and eventually legislative, route; but it would seem that the adoption of other provisions at the enterprise-by-enterprise level has been uneven.

Whitehouse, too, found that industrial agreements were not the best way of delivering family-friendly measures. To date, they have shown a low incidence of such measures, and even that low level would appear to have diminished since 1997–98. This is combined with a high incidence of measures relating to working-time flexibility that enable employers to vary working times and reduce employees’ ability to predict and control their hours. As a consequence, agreements tended to be in line with recent
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

developments such as the introduction of longer hours, work intensification and casualisation. Whitehouse pointed out that agreements may be better than some available alternatives, such as reliance on company policies and employer competition or even anti-discrimination case law, and that they were not likely to be supplanted by anything else in the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, they were seriously limited in comparison with legislation mandating paid parental leave and job guarantees, and with accessible child care provided with public support (Whitehouse 2001).

Eveline has expressed some disquiet about these recent developments in industrial relations, culminating in the WR Act in 1996. In particular, she was concerned that the move from the centralised court-based system which has existed in Australia since 1904, to a system of bargaining at the level of the individual enterprise, has meant that such benefits as family leave tend to be traded off for higher pay rates (Eveline 1999). Whitehouse looked into this issue of trade-offs in her investigation of industrial agreements. She found that, although such a scenario was not confirmed, what data there was did affirm the need for further research to investigate the possibility (Whitehouse 2001, p. 114).

3.3 International trends in fathers’ take-up of leave provisions

As many commentators have noted, one of the chief problems with provisions for men to take leave for child care is the low proportion of men who take it when it is offered (Fortune 1984; Connelly 1990; Core and Koutsogeorgopoulou 1995; Kamerman 2000; Kröger 2001; Eydal 2001). Some private companies in the US, which have been providing paternity leave for their staff since the 1980s, found that few men took advantage of the opportunity. The 1984 Catalyst survey found that about a third of the companies surveyed gave men some unpaid paternity leave. While that was an improvement on 1980, when the proportion had been 8.6 per cent (Fortune 1984; See also: Kiechel 1986; Brophy 1986), few men had taken up the leave provisions. In-house surveys conducted at Du Pont, for example, showed that, between 1985 and 1991, while male employees were increasingly interested in family leave—35 per cent in 1991 in comparison with 15 per cent five years before—only 54 men out of a workforce of 41,000 actually took it (Saltzman and Wiener 1993). Even in firms recognised as family-friendly, men’s take-up is low. At Corning Inc., named one of the four most family-friendly companies in the country by the Families and Work Institute, no more than 10 men took paternity leave in 1991 and 1992; while at another one of those companies, Aetna, only nine men took leave in 1991, and only five in 1992 (Saltzman and Wiener 1993).

In Sweden in the 1970s, when maternity leave became parental leave in order to include fathers, only about 2 per cent of eligible men took the leave, and most of them
were academics, professionals or employees of government, trade unions and social agencies (Cook 1989). In Norway in 1993, when four weeks’ paid paternity leave was introduced, only about 4 per cent of new fathers took advantage of it (Norway Daily 1996), although that had changed markedly by 1995 (see Tables 6 and 7). According to the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, only an average of 5 per cent of fathers in the EU Member States took paternity leave in 1995 (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999), while in Finland itself, fathers claim only 4 per cent of the parental leave (Heinen and Martiskainen de Koenigswarter 2001, p. 172). In Germany, only about 1 per cent of eligible fathers take advantage of the child-rearing leave benefit, despite its being designated a ‘parental’ (rather than ‘maternity’) benefit (Kamerman 2000). In contrast, in Iceland in the six months since the new law came into force on 1 January 2001, 46 per cent of the monthly payments for parental leave were paid to fathers (Eydal 2001, p. 18).

In the case of men’s take-up of leave provisions in European countries, a distinction must be made between paternity leave and parental leave. While men’s take-up of paternity leave can be fairly high, their take-up of the longer parental leave is low. Unless the distinction is made, it can seem as though men’s use of leave provisions is higher than it actually is. For example, Kamerman reported that more than half the qualified fathers took paternity leave in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, and that more than 90 per cent did so in Sweden. She went on to say, however, that ‘fathers’ use of the longer parental leave remains quite low’, with only about 1 per cent of eligible fathers in Germany taking this form of leave, and less than 5 per cent in Denmark and Finland (Kamerman 2000). (The figure of 90 per cent was in one year only—1990 [Haas and Hwang, 2000]). In Austria, fewer than 2 per cent of fathers take advantage of the policy that reserves the last six months of the two years of parental leave for the father (Clearinghouse 2001).

In Denmark, the fairly high proportion of men taking leave relates only to the two-week paternity leave. Around half of Danish fathers (55 per cent) were taking it by 1995, and it had become almost ‘a workplace norm’, according to Carlsen (Carlsen 1995, p. 54). In 1985, the proportion of men taking the two-week paternity leave had been 41 per cent; thus indicating an improvement over the ten years in men’s utilisation of the short paternity leave (Carlsen 1993, p. 80). A survey carried out by the Danish Equal Status Council, of the significance of work to the use of paternity and parental leave by Danish fathers of children born in 1989–90, found no men who had not taken the short paternity leave (Carlsen 1993, p. 82).

In contrast, only 3 per cent of fathers were taking any part of the 10-week parental leave by 1995. The Childcare Leave scheme—six months further leave per child for each parent until the child is eight—saw a slightly higher usage by fathers, who comprised 9 per cent of the users of this scheme during its trial period (Carlsen 1995, pp. 54–5). Carlsen points out, however, that official data on men’s use of parental leave can be misleading, and ‘therefore cannot be used as a gauge of men’s
willingness to spend time away from work to be with their children’. The Danish Equal Status Council survey found, for example, that men tended to use paid leave, e.g. accumulated time-in-lieu and holiday leave, in order to lengthen the total leave period beyond the two weeks (Carlsen 1993, p. 83).

It was in order to deal with the situation of men’s low take-up of parental leave that Sweden and Norway introduced the ‘father quota’, that is, reserving four weeks of the shared parental leave for the sole use of fathers. This is separate from and additional to the period of paternity leave.

There are comparatively high levels of take-up by fathers of the father’s quota of parental leave in Sweden and Norway. (Haas had earlier attributed the boost in fathers’ participation in parental leave in Sweden to information campaigns) (Haas 1992, p. 76). In Norway, in particular, the quota has been clearly associated with an increase in men’s use of parental leave (Eironline 1998). The Norwegian Minister of Children and Family Affairs, Grete Berget, said that its introduction was intended ‘to change attitudes’ and that it would appear to be having an effect in that there had been a sharp increase in the numbers of fathers taking up paid parental leave: ‘In 1993 about 4 per cent of the fathers who were entitled to parental benefits utilized their right. The corresponding data from 1995 shows that approximately 70 per cent of fathers terminated a parental benefit case’ (Berget 1996). Leira tells us that the ‘daddy quota’ was an immediate success, with nearly 70 per cent of all fathers and 80 per cent of those eligible taking it, either by sharing the leave with the mother, or by taking the four-week quota (Leira 1998, p. 373). Although fathers had been able to share the parental leave with the mother since 1978, very few had taken advantage of it until the quota was introduced (Xantippa nd). In Sweden in 1994, more than 75 per cent of eligible fathers took some part of the leave. The length of time men take off is still much less than that taken by women (Sains 2001), amounting to only 11 per cent of all parental leave taken (Kröger 2001). The average amount of leave taken by fathers was 44 days (Clearinghouse 2001; Father and Child 2001).

Table 5 shows the marked difference in men’s take-up of parental leave in Norway before and after the introduction of the father quota. In 1995, two years after the introduction of the four-week father quota, Norwegian men comprised 25 per cent of those receiving daily allowances in connection with pregnancy and childbirth, although they had been only 1.2 per cent of such recipients in 1990. (Note that the percentages in Table 5 refer to the proportions of all allowance recipients who were men, and not to the proportions of eligible men who received allowances. Hence, they are not comparable with the percentages in Table 6).
Table 5: Numbers of men receiving daily allowance; and men as a percentage of all recipients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Denmark No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Finland No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Iceland No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Norway No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Sweden No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>34 499</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27 338</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>104 356</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>41 003</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40 267</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>25 166</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>130 786</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>38 835</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39 149</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>28 267</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>146 839</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Brandth and Kvande give the following information about the proportions of eligible Norwegian men who used leave to care for children from 1988 to 1998. (Not all fathers are eligible, only those having partners who are eligible for leave themselves.)

Table 6: Percentage of fathers using leave in Norway 1988 to 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The authors found that, in the year covered by their own study and two years after the introduction of the paternity quota, three-quarters of eligible fathers had taken advantage of it (53 per cent of all fathers in the study, eligible or not). Of those who used the quota, the average length of leave taken was six-and-a-half weeks, while among those not eligible for paid leave the average time was one-and-a-half weeks (Brandth and Kvande 2001, pp. 258–9).

It is clear that there has been a remarkable rise in the number of Norwegian fathers taking leave to care for their children, largely as a result of the paternity quota, but rising even further more recently. The authors commented that it was the non-optional element, the ‘gentle force’, which most likely enhanced its success, not only because of its influence on fathers, but also because of its influence on employers who ‘must accept this provision by the state’ (p. 260). The father quota has not replaced the
earlier two-week unpaid paternity leave (‘daddy days’). In 1987, 70 per cent of Norwegian fathers used this leave at the time of their children’s birth, whether or not they received pay from their employer. In 1995, 68 per cent were still using it, indicating that the ‘daddy days’ had not been superseded by the paternity quota of the parental leave, but that men used both (pp. 260–1).

In contrast to the four-week father quota, men’s take-up of the optional portion of parental leave has not shown any marked improvement. In 1995, only 13 per cent of fathers in this Norwegian study had taken advantage of the opportunity to share the leave with the mother, although this was a marked improvement on 1987 when only 3 per cent of men did so (p. 261). The Time Account scheme, whereby parents can take their leave part-time, has been even less successful, only 1.5 per cent of eligible fathers in the 1995 study having availed themselves of it (and only 3.5 per cent of mothers) (p. 262).

Haas and Hwang say that the growth in the proportion of Swedish fathers who take leave to care for their children appears to have slowed. While the proportion increased yearly until 1990 when it was 55 per cent, it dropped to 51 per cent in 1994. The authors said that fathers take only a small proportion of the regular leave (which involves caring for children full-time)—the highest percentage being in 1994 when fathers took 11.4 per cent of all leave days (9.7 per cent in 1995 and 10.6 per cent in 1996). Men’s take-up of temporary leave, usually to care for sick children, is much higher although it too is declining. In 1996, 34 per cent of temporary leave days were taken by men, down from 44 per cent in 1990. Also in 1990, 90 per cent of Swedish fathers took all 10 of the special ‘daddy’ days available in the first two months after birth (or adoption), but by 1995 that proportion had fallen to 79 per cent of fathers taking an average of 7.9 special days (Haas and Hwang 2000).

Moreover, according to the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Table 7), the proportion of time taken for child care by men in the Nordic countries increased little, if at all, between 1990 and 1996. Sweden and Norway are again the exceptions, but even there, the proportion of men caring for children falls a long way below 50 per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999

In the US, in the four states studied by the Families and Work Institute after the passing of the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993, there was a small but significant increase in the percentage of men taking paternity leave, from 19 per cent to 22 per cent. The mean length of time taken, however, was only one week, and fathers tended
to use vacation time (which is paid) rather than taking the unpaid leave mandated under the Act (Scharlach and Grosswald 1997). Cunningham cites the case of one New York law firm which had found that 80 per cent of eligible men had taken the one month paid leave the firm offered on the birth of a child (Cunningham 2001); while Hammond cites a number of US companies with high levels of take-up by men (Hammond 2000).

3.4 Men’s take-up of leave provisions in Australia

Between 1993 and 1995, there was no rise in the numbers of men taking parental leave in Australia, despite the winning of the ACTU parental leave test case. However, the leave is unpaid, and there was also no rise in the numbers of women taking maternity leave either (Eveline 1999). In August 1995, twice as many men took bereavement leave as took parental leave (Kilmartin 1996).

The official Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data does have some information on take-up of family leave provisions, but there is still a great deal they do not tell us.

Working Arrangements (ABS 2001b)

The Working Arrangements series includes questions about paternity/maternity leave and (more recently) parental/carer’s leave. So far, however, no obvious trends have appeared from these data. In 1995, 1997 and 2000, men were respectively 26 per cent, 28.9 per cent and 18.7 per cent of those who were absent from work because of the birth of a child (maternity/paternity leave) in the two weeks prior to the survey. These proportions do not tell us if men’s use of this kind of leave is increasing or decreasing, especially as the numbers of both sexes in 2000 are markedly lower than in the previous two years, and hence less statistically reliable. Nothing at all, of course, can be said about trends in usage of leave for older children, since the data were collected only for the one year.
Table 8: Leave for family purposes, 1995, 1997 and 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity/paternity leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental/carers leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>~</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~ Data not collected in 1995 and 1997

Source: ABS 2001b, Table 12, p. 26

The two-week period is too short a time to capture fully people's usage of leave around childbirth. The birth of a child is a rare occurrence in anyone's life, and respondents are unlikely to forget whether or not they took leave at the time—so there is no technical need to make the time-span so short. Moreover, the shortness of the period means that the survey cannot provide a useful estimate of the numbers of Australians using parental leave in any one year. Perhaps it would be in the interests of FaCS and DEWR to persuade the ABS to modify this question and ask about weeks of maternity/paternity leave in the last twelve months or two years.

Of the 1 900 400 employees who had children under the age of 12 years, only 20 500 took parental or carer’s leave in 2000. Of these, 6800 were men. Although men comprised nearly 59 per cent of employees with children under 12, they were only just over 33 per cent of those who took parental/carer’s leave. Moreover, while women who took leave to care for a family member were 1.7 per cent of female employees with children under 12, men who took such leave were only 0.6 per cent of male employees with young children. These figures reflect attitudes on the part of both women and men about who should take parental leave. Baxter cites the 1995–6 Australian National Social Science Survey that found that 74 per cent of men and 83 per cent of women believed that it was women who should have the right to parental leave (Baxter 2000, p. 20).
Among employees with young children who would like to work more hours, the sexes were evenly divided. Men were slightly more likely than women to be happy with their hours of work, although men were more than twice as likely as women to want fewer hours of work, reflecting the fact that they are overwhelmingly in full-time work.

Most people with young children (61.4 per cent) found the number of hours they worked quite satisfactory, at least to the extent that they did not want to change them. Those who worked full-time were slightly less satisfied than those who worked part-time (58.5 per cent compared with 68.2 per cent), and over a third of full-time workers said they would prefer to work fewer hours. Interpreting these figures is difficult because people accommodate themselves to the constraints of their situations and hence the psychic cost of expressing dissatisfaction is high. The level of job satisfaction, even among populations in the lowest status, poorly paid occupations, is generally above 75 per cent. Consequently, an apparently high figure of 70 per cent job satisfaction, may indicate a drastically low level of satisfaction. Similar influences

---

### Table 9: Employees with children under 12 who took parental/carer’s leave in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Children under 12</th>
<th>Took parental/carer’s leave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1117.1</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>783.3</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1900.4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2001b, Tables 11, 12, pp. 25–6

### Table 10: Working time preferences of employees with children under 12 in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More hours</th>
<th>Fewer hours</th>
<th>No change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>103.3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>360.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>107.4</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>161.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210.6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>522.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part-time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More hours</th>
<th>Fewer hours</th>
<th>No change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>99.6</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>131.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>52.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Full-time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More hours</th>
<th>Fewer hours</th>
<th>No change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.('000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>356.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>114.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>100*</td>
<td>470.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures may not total because of rounding

Source: ABS 2001b, Table 11, pp. 24–5
make interpreting findings about marital satisfaction or the fairness of the domestic division of labour treacherous (Thompson 1991).

Table 11: Employees’ working hours preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More hours</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>131.4</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>210.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer hours</td>
<td>470.3</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>522.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>773.4</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>1167.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1323.0*</td>
<td>100*</td>
<td>577.5*</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1900.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Figures may not total because of rounding

Source: ABS 2001b, Table 11, pp. 24–5

There was little difference between the sexes among full-time workers. A slightly higher proportion of men (58.9 per cent) than women (56.8 per cent) did not want to change their hours of work. In the case of both men and women, most people who worked full-time said they wanted no change in their hours of work, although the majority was not an overwhelming one in either case. There was a large minority—over a third of full-time men, and over two-fifths of women—who expressed a desire to work fewer hours. Men who worked part-time were also largely satisfied with their hours of work, but here there was a significant proportion—over 41 per cent—who expressed a wish to work longer hours. Women were much more satisfied than men with their part-time work hours—70.6 per cent said they did not want to change them, while only half as many women as men wanted more hours. Women on the whole were somewhat more likely to want more hours of work than men were, and less likely to want fewer. This probably reflects the higher proportion of women who work part-time. There are more women among the mothers of children under 12 working part-time—they are 64 per cent of all female employees with young children. This finding is consistent with the fact that women, not men, rearrange their working hours to meet their responsibilities for child care, even though they would like to maintain their commitment to pursuing a career.
Family-friendly practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>All men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘000</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More hours</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer hours</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>612.7</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1040.2*</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>76.8*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>All women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘000</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>‘000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More hours</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>99.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer hours</td>
<td>114.3</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>160.6</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>353.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282.6</td>
<td>100*</td>
<td>500.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures may not total because of rounding
Source: ABS 2001b, Table 11, pp. 24–5

Child Care (ABS 2001a)

Table 13 shows the proportions of fathers with children under 12 in families with employed fathers, and mothers in families with employed mothers, who used work arrangements to care for their children in 1999, together with the proportion of families with at least one employed parent who did so. Overall, 52.9 per cent of families with children under the age of 12 used one of a number of work arrangements to assist with their care for children. Mothers were far more likely than fathers to do so—67.8 per cent of mothers in comparison with 26.7 per cent of fathers. Both women and men used flexible working hours more than any other arrangement, although women used permanent part-time work almost as often, while men used that option hardly at all (33.7 per cent of women and 1.9 per cent of men). Working from home is an infrequent solution to the problems of balancing work and family responsibilities, and job-sharing is even rarer.
Table 13: Use of working arrangements to care for children, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work arrangement</th>
<th>Fathers '000</th>
<th>Fathers %</th>
<th>Mothers '000</th>
<th>Mothers %</th>
<th>Families '000</th>
<th>Families %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible hours</td>
<td>232.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>340.9</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>474.7</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent part-time work</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>312.1</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>336.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiftwork</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>135.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at home</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>142.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>198.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job sharing</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total used work arrangements(a)</td>
<td>343.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>627.3</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>773.2</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not use work arrangements</td>
<td>943.2</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>298.2</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>689.4</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total families with parent employed</td>
<td>1286.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>925.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1462.6(b)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Does not equal total of components because parents could use more than one arrangement.
(b) Does not equal the total of the fathers and mothers because some families with at least one parent employed have two parents employed.

Source: ABS 2000a, Table 30, p. 42

The information about fathers who used work arrangements to care for children is tabulated only for ‘families with an employed father’, while the information about mothers who used work arrangements is tabulated only for ‘families with an employed mother’. The final row in Table 13, for ‘all families with at least one parent employed’, refers only to whether or not ‘either parent’ used work arrangements, not to fathers and mothers separately. So there is no information to allow us to compare the extent to which men used work arrangements to look after their children across all families. It is plausible that the usage of work arrangements by fathers might vary depending on the labour force status of the mother, but the data do not allow us to compare fathers’ usage in families with a single male earner with that in families where both parents work, and whether the mother works part-time or full-time. It is possible that it is higher in families where the mother is employed too, but it is not possible to tell from the published data. Hence the data probably understate men’s usage, in that the category of ‘families with an employed father’ will include some with a non-employed mother, a family arrangement that places less pressure on fathers for child care.

From the information in Table 14 below, it would seem that fathers’ usage is increasing. However, the rate of change is slow, with the total increases between first and last survey in the time series never exceeding 3 per cent—a level of increase that is not much greater than relative standard error associated with these estimates.
Family-friendly practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘000</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>‘000</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>‘000</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total used work arrangements</td>
<td>312.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>340.9</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>343.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not use work arrangements</td>
<td>967.5</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>965.4</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>943.2</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total families with father employed</td>
<td>1279.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1306.3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1286.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2000a, Table 30, p. 42

Career experience (ABS 1999)

In 1998, 3 per cent of employees took a career break of six months or more, 1.9 per cent of men and 4.4 per cent of women.

| Table 15: Employees who had a career break of six months or more, 1998 |
|--------------------------|------|----|------|----|------|----|
|                          | Men  | | Women | | Total | |
|                          | ‘000 | %  | ‘000 | %  | ‘000 | %  |
| Career break             | 62.6 | 1.9 | 119.5 | 4.4 | 182.1 | 3   |
| No career break          | 3259.7 | 97.7 | 2569.8 | 95 | 5829.5 | 96.5 |
| Total\(^{(a)}\)           | 3335.4 | 100 | 2703.9 | 100 | 6039.2 | 100 |

\(^{(a)}\) Includes persons for whom details of breaks could not be determined.

Source: ABS 1999, Table 12, p. 22

Of those who took a career break, 65.6 per cent were women. In the case of both sexes, the majority who took career breaks did not have children under 12, although women were slightly more likely to take a career break if they had young children, and men slightly less likely.

| Table 16: Employees with and without children under 12 who took a career break |
|--------------------------|------|----|------|----|------|----|
|                          | With children under 12 | | Without children under 12 | | Total career break | |
|                          | ‘000 | %  | ‘000 | %  | ‘000 | %  |
| Men                      | 18.6 | 30.8 | 44.0 | 36.2 | 62.6 | 34.4 |
| Women                    | 41.8 | 69.2 | 77.7 | 63.8 | 119.5 | 65.6 |
| Total career break       | 60.4 | 100 | 121.7 | 100 | 182.1 | 100 |

Source: ABS 1999, Table 12, p. 22

Women were much more likely than men to give ‘family’ as the reason for their career break—62.2 per cent of women compared with 21.4 per cent of men.
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

### Table 17: Reasons for career break

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1993 Men</th>
<th>1996 Men</th>
<th>1999 Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/other</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>119.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS, 1999, Table 12, p. 22

Men were in the majority (60.6 per cent) of wage and salary earners with children under six years who took a break from work when their youngest child was born, while women were only 38.4 per cent. There were, however, 47 000 women whose ‘career break’ involved ceasing work (16.8 per cent of 279 700). Needless to say, there would be many thousands more women who took a career break but were not captured in this survey because they did not describe themselves as employees. The length of time men took off work was considerably shorter than the time women took off. Men were 94.6 per cent of those who took less than six weeks, and only 1.5 per cent of those who took more than six months.

### Table 18: Employees with children under six years who took a career break when their youngest child was born

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less than 6 weeks</th>
<th>6 weeks to 6 months</th>
<th>More than 6 months</th>
<th>Total(a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘000</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>‘000</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>411.1</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>434.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Includes persons currently on leave

Source: ABS 1999, Table 13, p. 23

Overwhelmingly, the male employees who took time off when their children were born took less than six weeks—over 95 per cent—while the majority of women employees—56.7 per cent—took six months or more.
Table 19: Length of time taken off work when youngest child was born

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'000</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 weeks</td>
<td>411.1</td>
<td>95.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 weeks to 6 months</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 6 months</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(a)</td>
<td>430.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 weeks</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 weeks to 6 months</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 6 months</td>
<td>158.7</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(a)</td>
<td>279.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Includes persons currently on leave
Source: ABS 1999: Table 13, p. 23

The figures do not indicate how much less than six weeks men took in 1998, but since most of them took paid leave (338 200 or 82.3 per cent), most of it was likely to have been less than two weeks. In contrast, most women took unpaid leave (53.4 per cent), even when that leave was less than six weeks.

Table 20: Whether leave was paid or unpaid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'000</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave</td>
<td>338.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid leave</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>411.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid leave</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Balancing Work and Caring Responsibilities, Tasmania, 1999 (ABS 2000b)
The survey of employees and the self-employed in Tasmania in October 1999, (ABS 2000b), contains very little relevant information. It surveyed employees (175 800 persons) and the self-employed (27 000 persons). There were 22 800 employees (13 per cent) who had taken time off work in the previous three months to care for another person, of whom 9700 (42.5 per cent) were women. Of those who had taken time off work in the previous three months to care for another person, 17 000 had cared for a child or children. Of these, 6800 (31 per cent) were men. Of those who had taken time off to care for family members, 37 per cent had used paid sick and/or carer’s leave.
Workers with Family Responsibilities, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ABS 1995)

**Table 21:** Proportions of males and females working full-time and part-time, Western Australia, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Australia</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. ('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No. ('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>242.2</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>144.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>260.9</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>216.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 1995

**Table 22:** Proportions of males and females working full-time and part-time, Australian Capital Territory, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Capital Territory</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. ('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No. ('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 1995

As can be seen from Table 23, in both states taking time off work for school holidays is shared fairly equally by men and women, although this figure provides little information on how workers managed that vacation care. Similar proportions of both sexes in both states took children into work but the frequency with which this occurred is not available. Working part-time ‘for child care reasons’ is an alternative rarely chosen by men and those making this accommodation to family responsibilities are mainly women (92 per cent to 98 per cent). Men in paid employment were far less likely than women to have made job changes to meet family responsibilities, or to have taken time off work when the usual carer was not available or when children or family members were sick. Among men with preschool-age children, over two-thirds of male respondents answered that their ‘partner’ was the usual carer.
Table 23: Working arrangements made to accommodate family responsibilities, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arrangements</th>
<th>Western Australia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Australian Capital Territory</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. ('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No. ('000)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took time off work for school holidays</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took children in to work</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made job changes(^a) to meet family responsibilities</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took time off work when usual carer not available</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took time off work to care for sick children</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took sick leave to care for family members</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took unpaid leave to care for family members</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work part-time for child care reasons</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner usual carer for preschool-age children</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Includes turning down promotion, changing or leaving a job, reducing regular hours of work, or changing shifts, hours or days worked.

Source: ABS 1995

Managing Caring Responsibilities and Paid Employment, New South Wales (ABS 2001a)

This was a State Supplementary Survey (NSW), October 2000 Labour Force Survey. It covered the population aged 18 to 54—4,771,400 persons (of whom 2,351,300—49.3 per cent—were men). Of these persons, 1,994,500 (42 per cent) had cared for another person in the previous six months. The notes say that ‘just over half of all carers (53 per cent) had children under the age of 15 and were caring for their children only’ (p. 3). But this information is not included in any of the tables and so it is not possible to study how it is associated with the other variables, nor to differentiate elder care from child care.

Men were 44 per cent of those who provided care in the six months prior to October 2000.
Half (996 200) of those who provided care were in paid employment, and of these, 46 per cent (401 900) had used some form of workplace arrangement for caring purposes. Men were more likely than women to use paid arrangements with job guarantees, while women were more likely than men to use unpaid or insecure arrangements, e.g. part-time or casual work.

**Table 25: Type of work arrangements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'000</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flex time</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDO</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAH</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in lieu</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift work</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time work</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual work</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal arrangement</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid leave</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(a)</td>
<td>168.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) Figures do not sum to total because respondents could use more than one type of arrangement.

Source: ABS 2001a, Table 3, p. 6

### 3.5 Other family-friendly strategies

As mentioned above, there are other ways of managing the competing demands of work and family than formal leave arrangements—among them part-time work and flexible and non-standard hours of working. Quite apart from any benefit these forms of working arrangements might have for reconciling work and family, they are
becoming increasingly common. As Bosch points out, ‘the organization of working time has changed considerably…over the last 20 years’, with ‘working time no longer automatically organized on a weekly or annual basis’ (Bosch 1999, p. 131). The question in this context is whether or not this is a positive development for the family-friendliness of workplaces.

Part-time work
At first sight, it might appear that part-time work could be a large part of the solution to the problem of reconciling caring for children with paid work. If parents, especially those of young children, were not constrained by a full-time, unbroken attachment to the labour force, they would have more time for family life and interaction with their children. As Bollé has pointed out, part-time work does ‘make…it easier to reconcile family responsibilities with employment’. It also has ‘the added advantage of maintaining a link with working life and thus avoiding a total break’ (Bollé 1997, p. 7). Over the last 20 years or so, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of part-time jobs, an increase that has coincided with an increase in women’s labour force participation, growth in the service sector industries, and employers’ desire for flexibility (Bollé 1997, pp. 8–9). As Baxter has pointed out, leave arrangements and flexible working hours are essential for women in the paid labour force, given that they still continue to have the major responsibility for housework and child care (Baxter 2000, p. 25). Indeed, that would seem to be the option chosen by many women. The Australian Institute of Family Studies found, for example, that women who worked part-time were more satisfied with the number of hours they worked and the flexibility of their working arrangements, than were either men or women who worked full-time (Wolcott and Glezer 1995, p. 47). For a number of reasons, however, part-time work is a less than ideal solution.

In the first place, expressed levels of satisfaction do not always give an accurate picture of employment conditions. As Baxter, Lynch-Blosse and Western have pointed out, women have been known to report as much satisfaction with their jobs as men do, even though objectively their working conditions are worse. These authors attribute this to women’s realistic appraisal of the ‘structural constraints imposed by the labour market’. Women know they can expect less than men—lower pay, fewer career opportunities, inflexible work hours, the unavailability of child care—and adjust their expectations accordingly (Baxter, Lynch-Blosse and Western 1996, p. 293). So women can report satisfaction with their part-time employment arrangements, despite the disadvantages (see below), because there are no alternatives if they need to continue in paid work while caring for a family.

It is possible, however, that levels of satisfaction with the current arrangements of part-time work would be a great deal lower if women were to be offered genuine alternatives—a 50–50 division of the household labour, plus accessible, trustworthy, high quality child care, plus secure, well-paid employment, plus the benefits which go
Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

along with full-time work. Beechey and Perkins point out, for example, that women do tend to work full-time where child care facilities are provided, e.g. in the Lancashire textiles industry and in countries like France (although they also advise caution 'about conjecture in this area' since there is no way of knowing with 'any absolute certainty' what women would have done if conditions had been different) (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 29, 186, fn. 7). As Thompson has argued in connection with women's perceptions of what counts as a fair division of the domestic work between husband and wife, what constitutes 'fairness' depends on what standard of comparison is being used. If the standard is deficient—e.g. he 'helps' her with the housework, he's better than other husbands, he's the breadwinner, she's better at it than he is—the judgement of fairness or satisfaction can be combined with a large measure of inequality (Thompson 1991).

Moreover, the conditions of part-time work are less favourable than for full-time work. Part-time workers suffer from a number of disadvantages: fewer social benefits such as bonuses, holiday and sickness pay, training allowances, etc.; few or no penalty rates for overtime; unreliability of hours and working times; little opportunity for union activities or staff representation; low prospects for advancement and promotion; lower skill levels than those in full-time jobs; and worse staff-management relations (Bollé 1997, pp. 5–8). This author also mentioned lower hourly wage rates as one of the disadvantages of part-time work. But this is not the case in Australia where, as Delsen points out, higher hourly rates for part-time work are intended to compensate for the lack of benefits (Delsen 1998, p. 74, fn. 4). Baxter attributes this to the award system and higher rates of unionisation than in other countries (Baxter 1998, p. 278).

Nonetheless, Baxter commented, careers that deviate from the traditional full-time, continuous model 'are subject to penalties such as fewer promotion opportunities, loss of leave entitlements, superannuation benefits and other kinds of financial penalties' (Baxter 2000, p. 13). Beechey and Perkins also point out the disadvantages connected with part-time work, commenting that it tends to be 'highly exploitative and heavily gender-specific' (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 3).

It can also be involuntary. This is usually seen in terms of people wanting to work full-time hours but unable to do so because the work is not available ('underemployment'—Bollé 1997). But there can be other reasons why people do not work full-time even though they may want to. Women's family responsibilities can be such a barrier to full-time work. This is sometimes seen as a matter of choice. Baxter, for example, says that 'most women who work part-time do so out of choice as a result of child-bearing and child-rearing considerations' (Baxter 1998, p. 268). But as Beechey and Perkins point out, in the absence of adequate provision for child care, women who want paid work have 'little option but to work part-time' (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 29).

Moreover, the same authors point out that hours of work are not on the whole organised with workers' interests in mind: 'With few exceptions, in recent years
employers have reorganized part-timers’ hours with little or no consideration of women’s needs’ (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 6). That part-time work is by and large an employer-driven job requirement is indicated by the fact that people do not on the whole give family responsibilities as their reason for working part-time. In Australia in 1993, only 16 per cent of part-time female workers gave this reason for working part-time, although 38 per cent of part-time women workers with children under 14 said they worked part-time for family reasons. Of male part-time workers with children under 14, only 4 per cent gave family commitments as their reason for working part-time (Baxter 2000, p. 18).

Part-time work is numerically dominated by women, although that would appear to be gradually changing. As Table 26 shows, the proportion of part-time workers who were women dropped slightly (although steadily) in Australia in the late 1990s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1995 (‘000)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1997 (‘000)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2000 (‘000)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1227.2</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>1308.1</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>1541.8</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>359.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>420.1</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>566.8</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1586.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1728.2</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2108.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2001b, Table 1—Part-time employees, p. 8

It has been suggested that part-time work is particularly suited to women both because of the typical situation of women and because of employer preferences. Beechey and Perkins, for example, point out that, ‘since wives and mothers…generally have domestic responsibilities, [and] given the lack of public facilities for child care, they are often only able to work part-time’. They also point out the advantages to employers: ‘that [women] provided a source of labour in times of scarcity…enable[d] managements to meet fluctuations in demand, and…could easily be disposed of’.

The authors emphasised that these connections between women and part-time work are socially constructed and hence that there is nothing natural or inevitable about them (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 79, 102).

Hence men rarely work part-time. Smith, Fagan and Rubery found from their study of the 1994 European Labour Force Survey that, in 12 of the 15 member states of the EU, 70 per cent of part-time workers were women. In the case of men, the proportions who worked part-time ranged from under 5 per cent in most countries to around 10 per cent in Denmark and the Netherlands (Smith, Fagan and Rubery 1998, p. 36). In 1999, Becker gave a figure of 16 per cent for male part-time work, a proportion that he said was ‘very high’ (Becker 1999, p. 5). In Australia, the proportion of men working part-time has increased, from 4 per cent in 1973 to 10 per cent in 1993, but the proportion of women working part-time has increased even further and from a higher starting
Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

point, from 28 per cent of employed women in 1973 to 42 per cent in 1993 (Baxter 2000, p. 17). As Beechey and Perkins put it: ‘the division between full-time and part-time work is one crucial contemporary manifestation of gender within the sphere of production’ (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 9), pointing out that ‘part-time work is overwhelmingly women’s work’ (p. 2). They note that the situation varies cross-nationally, with France, Japan and especially Finland having low levels of part-time work among women. But overall, and particularly in Britain, the tendency has been to develop part-time work ‘on the assumption that it will be done by women with domestic responsibilities’ (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 9), pointing out that ‘part-time work is overwhelmingly women’s work’—it has enabled women to enter the workforce and to be available to serve the requirements of the service sector, while allowing men to retain their traditional ‘breadwinner’ role (Fagan and O'Reilly 1998, p. 23).

Delsen (1998) has suggested that men are unwilling to take part-time jobs because of the low status of such employment, and for ‘cultural’ reasons, such as ideas about what is ‘normal and proper’ for men to do in supporting a family and taking on family responsibilities (Delsen 1998, p. 65, 73). This author has found that men who do work part-time tend to be either younger or older than men of prime working age: ‘Male part-time work is typical of either end of the age spectrum…[with] above-average proportions of employed men working part-time in the 15 to 24 and [in the] 55 and over age groups’ (Delsen 1998, p. 61). Fagan and O'Reilly comment that most men working part-time ‘are students, other young labour market entrants and older men approaching retirement’ (Fagan and O'Reilly 1998, p. 6). Delsen sees part-time work for men as a bridge, either into work on the part of young people, or into retirement for older men, whereas for women it tends to be a trap (Delsen 1998, p. 73).

There has, however, been some increase in the proportions of prime working age men working part-time. Delsen noted that the relative number of prime-age male part-timers in the EU increased 50 per cent between 1991 and 1995. This author sees this as a positive development, especially as part-time work has also been increasing in the upper levels of employment, including management (Delsen 1998, p. 62, 68). Other authors, however, are less sanguine. Baxter, for example, notes that the conditions for part-time employment are likely to worsen in Australia and New Zealand as a result of deregulation, decentralised wage bargaining, decreased unionisation, a lesser voice for women in government policy-making and the on-going unequal burden of domestic responsibilities on women (Baxter 1998, p. 278). Fagan and O'Reilly suggest that the growth in part-time work among men could be partly the result of the restructuring of the welfare state that could increase poverty levels among men by driving down basic income standards, although they do not see this as inevitable—social security systems do not have to penalise part-time work (Fagan and O'Reilly 1998, p. 6).

They point out that part-timers are in a better position when entitlements are based
on citizenship rights than when those entitlements are dependent on lifetime employment, but that ‘the trend in most countries is to cut basic guarantees and to tighten the link to lifetime earnings’ (p. 20).

The disadvantages of part-time work are not inevitable, however. Bollé says that it could be ‘an excellent means of dividing one’s time between economic activity, family responsibilities and other pursuits’, as long as it is legally protected, has the same benefits and entitlements as full-time work, and is freely chosen by workers (Bollé 1997, p. 8). O’Reilly and Fagan argue that it needs to be ‘integrated alongside full-time work’, rather than marginalised as a source of cheap labour which can drive down the standards of full-time employment. If part-time work attracted the same hourly rates and conditions as full-time work, if there were national minimum wage standards for both, and if income replacement systems did not discriminate against part-timers, then part-time work would improve in quality for women and become more attractive to men (O’Reilly and Fagan 1998, p. 23).

Flexible work hours
According to the judging panel for the 2000 ACCI Corporate Work and Family Awards, it would seem that the most important provision from the employees’ point of view involved policies that gave them control over working hours, and allowed for flexible starting and finishing times and short periods of time off work to attend to personal responsibilities (WFU 2000). These arrangements are also attractive to employers, but not necessarily in ways advantageous for workers. Moves away from standard working hours can mean that overtime and unsociable hours, that is, hours outside the normal weekday, no longer attract penalty rates. It is in the interests of employers to have workers on call (although without being paid) for peak periods and times of greatest consumer demand, but it also increases workers’ insecurity. Baxter suggests that such practices could lead to greater gender inequality since women are ‘more likely than men to work unsocial hours— evenings, weekends and nights’ (Baxter 2000, p. 18).

This would appear to be at least partly generated by the behaviour of employers. Beechey and Perkins found, for example, that employers used different forms of flexibility depending on whether the work was done by women or men. ‘Flexibility’ in the case of women’s work meant part-time jobs, whereas in the case of men’s jobs, it tended to be introduced as overtime, short-time working and employing temporaries. The authors comment that part-time work cannot be explained wholly in economic terms, given that ‘[g]ender enters into the picture’. It is, they say, ‘because they are “women’s jobs” that so many of the jobs in the service sectors of the economy are part-time’ (Beechey and Perkins 1987, p. 37, 76).

In Australia in 1993, only 24 per cent of fathers of children under 11 used some form of flexible work arrangement as a way of caring for the children, whereas 68 per cent of employed mothers did so (Baxter 2000, p. 18).
Flexible hours are in the best interests of employees when they ‘are coordinated with other policies and regulations that improve the conditions under which women and men supply that working-time flexibility’ (Fagan 1996, quoted in Baxter 2000, p. 18).

**Shift-work (non-standard hours, i.e. evenings, nights, rotating, weekends)**

Once again, working non-standard hours would seem to be a way of combining work with family responsibilities. As Presser has pointed out, when mothers work outside the normal range of the working day, it is possible for other family members, e.g. grandmother or father, to care for the children when she is at work, thus saving on the cost of child care. In the case of the father, this has the added advantage of enabling him to spend more time with his children (Presser 1995, p. 3; Presser 1999, pp. 4–5). As with part-time work, however, this working-time accommodation to family life also has its drawbacks.

There are indications that working nonstandard hours places extra stress on family life and increases the likelihood of couples separating or divorcing. Using data from two waves of the US National Survey of Families and Households in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Presser (2000) found more marital instability among those shift-workers who worked night-time (midnight to 8.00 am) and rotating shifts (although not among those working evening shifts—4.00 pm to midnight), than among those survey respondents who worked during the day. Men with children, who worked the night-time shift and had been married less than five years at the time of the first wave of surveys, were six times more likely to be divorced or separated by the second wave than were day-time workers; women night-workers with children, who had been married more than five years at the time of the first surveys, were three times more likely than day workers to have divorced or separated by the time of the second wave of surveys. Working rotating shifts doubled the likelihood of marital dissolution for mothers (although not for fathers) (Presser 2000, p. 15). Earlier research had found, she said, that shift work made family outings and activities hard to arrange, meant less time for families to be together, and created difficulties for both women and men in the performance of their traditional roles—for men as family protectors and sexual partners, and women as housewives (Presser 2000, pp. 3–4).

Presser also points out that working nonstandard hours can have adverse effects on health. Citing work done by the US Office of Technological Assessment, she says that such schedules upset people's circadian rhythms, ‘often leading to sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal disorders, and chronic malaise’ (Presser 1999, p. 7).

Again, like part-time work and flexible hours, non-standard hours tend to be involuntary, both in the sense that they are not chosen by employees but required by employers, and in the sense that people are not working unsocial hours through preference but for structural reasons. In the case of the former, Presser points out that shift work arranged only with employers’ needs in mind tends to be viewed by employees as against their interests, while flexibility in working arrangements tends to
be viewed positively (Presser 1995, p. 2). She also notes that 58.7 per cent of shift-
worker respondents to the May 1991 Current Population Survey in the US gave as their
chief reason for working nonstandard hours an answer coded ‘involuntary’, usually
that it was a job requirement (p. 7). In the case of structural reasons, Presser
characterises these as economic, demographic and technological. She points to the
growth in the service sector of the economy, such factors as the postponement of
marriage and ageing of the population, and the ‘global 24-hour economy’ and ‘the rise
of multinational corporations’ whose work-places span the globe aided by
communications technology and whose work force needs to be perpetually available
(Presser 1999, pp. 3–4).
4 Some reasons why men do not take-up opportunities to care for their children

The literature review uncovered a number of reasons for men's seeming reluctance to take time off work to care for their children. Among those reasons were: concerns about money and career; beliefs and attitudes about masculinity; men's relationship to work on the one hand and family on the other; and workforce pressures that intensified workloads and prolonged the working day.

4.1 Money

One of the most common reasons why men do not take leave to care for their children is financial (Levine 1987; Marketing to Women 2001; Sains 2001; Cunningham 2001). Men do not take leave to care for children because it is not, by and large, economically feasible (Israeloff 1995; Wolcott and Glezer 1995, p. 140). Carlsen said that, in Denmark, '[f]inancial considerations continue to be a large barrier to men's taking parental leave'. He pointed out that the introduction throughout the public sector of full pay for all leave connected with childbirth, was a major part of the reason why fathers employed in the public sector were more likely to take their parental leave entitlements than those employed in the private sector (Carlsen 1993, pp. 80–1).

Even where allowances during leave are comparatively generous, they are usually not an adequate replacement for a male wage. In Sweden, for example, although the government subsidy often covers most of a woman's salary, it rarely comes anywhere near compensating for a man's. The result is that many families are better off financially if the man continues to work and forgoes the month's payment to which he is entitled (Sains 2001). Haas concludes from her study of parental leave in Sweden that men are highly unlikely to take advantage of unpaid leave opportunities or to work part-time, and that 'fathers take advantage of benefits more often when they do not lead to a significant loss of income' (Haas, 1992, p. 68). She also points out that the family loses more money when the father takes leave, because men are paid more highly than women (pp. 105–6). Glezer reports that 59 per cent of the partnered women surveyed by AIFS in its maternity leave study in 1985 had partners who took leave at the time of the birth, but most of those partners (55 per cent) had taken some form of paid leave, while only 16 per cent had taken the unpaid paternity/parental leave (Glezer 1988, pp. 39–40).
4.2 Career

Another reason is a fear on the part of men that it will adversely affect their careers (Levine 1987; Saltzman and Wiener 1993; Israeloff 1995; Marketing to Women 2001; Eveline 1999; Hammond 2000). As Jennifer McEnroe noted, ‘men fear losing their status, or even their jobs, if they get on the daddy track’ (McEnroe 1991). A survey of 1206 private workplaces in the US, conducted in 1995 by Westat, Inc. for the Commission on Family and Medical Leave, found that 22 per cent of leave takers were worried about losing their jobs, and 14 per cent about losing seniority (Scharlach and Grosswald 1997). At least one researcher found that some of the men in his study who had taken time off work to be the primary carers of their children had ‘slipped a rung or two’, and that they were ‘often not taken seriously about their long-term career plans’ (Connelly 1990). As other commentators have noted, ‘with downsizing the order of the day, few employees want to send a signal that they are less than 100 percent devoted to their jobs’ (Saltzman and Wiener 1993).

Wajcman (1998) has suggested that these fears are well grounded, given the continuing influence of conventional sex roles. She points out that, traditionally, the male career has depended on having a wife at home to provide the support necessary to enable professional men and managers to devote time and energy to their paid work. ‘The managerial/professional career is a particularly telling example of the dependence of male workers upon their wives’ domestic labour’, she writes, because the demands it makes of men leave very little time for anything else (Wajcman 1998, p. 43). The implication here is that it is corporate reality which has to change, and not just the behaviour of men.

4.3 ‘Culture’

Other reasons for men’s low take-up can only be called ‘cultural’, that is, they appeal to certain ideas about what it means to be a man, and what kinds of relationships there ought to be between men and work on the one hand, and men and families on the other. Sommer couched this in terms of ‘strong myths’ that are both self-fulfilling (because they emphasise certain aspects of reality) and out-of-step with reality (because they ignore other aspects). In particular, this author mentioned two beliefs: that men have only an instrumental, and hence detached and rational, role to play in the family; and that the mother ought to be the child’s exclusive and indispensable caretaker. Sommer argued that these and similar beliefs merely reproduced ‘cultural stereotypes and generally accepted attitudes towards gender, masculinity and femininity’, rather than questioning them with the aim of producing different understandings and a greater range of opportunities for everyone (Sommer 1993, pp. 160–2).
Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

Haas found that, ‘[i]n a discussion about why so few Swedish men take parental leave, the first thing mentioned by every one of these fathers was the role played by traditional values’ (Haas 1992, p. 91). McKie et al cite studies which found barriers to men's participation in caring ‘arising from ideas that caring work is not masculine, that “proper” work is full time, continuous and done by men and that “proper men” work full time’ (McKie et al 2001, p. 238).

While Haas' study found no information on Swedish employers’ attitudes to parental leave, it did find that ‘men perceive a lack of support from their workplace’ (Haas 1992, p. 99). A study by Russell and Edgar of a mining company with a 93 per cent male workforce found a number of problems in the workplace, despite the company's expressed support for work-family issues. There was a lack of flexibility for employees to take leave for family reasons, for example; many workers, especially managers and supervisors, suffered from stress as a result of work-family demands; and there were strong expectations about working long hours and shift work (Russell and Edgar 2000).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that part of the problem is a corporate culture that: ‘undervalues and even punishes caring fathers’; views workplace arrangements to care for children as irrelevant for men; doesn’t want to deal with family problems; and fails to accept programs such as paternity leave (Saltzman 1988). As one consultant on work and family matters put it, a company which validates ‘those macho “heroes” who go 60 hours without sleep and work every weekend’ is hardly likely to be serious in its commitment to family friendliness (Saltzman and Wiener 1993). Cunningham points out in his study of US law firms that ‘men…have to overcome the sizeable attitudinal barriers of upper management’. Citing a report in the Washington Times, he said, ‘When asked what is a reasonable amount of time for a father to take off from work upon the birth or adoption of a child, sixty-three percent of 1500 chief executive officers and human resource directors said “none”’. He went on to comment, ‘the pressures on men within the [law] firm not to take time off when their babies arrive are extraordinary…corporate policies ingrain age-old attitudes about what a man’s role, of lack thereof, should be in his newborn’s life’ (Cunningham 2001). Citing the findings of the Danish Equal Status Council survey, Carlsen commented that whether or not men used paternity and parental leave schemes was heavily influenced by the attitudes of superiors and colleagues (Carlsen 1993, p. 87).

The cultural barriers are not simply a matter of beliefs and attitudes among middle and senior management. The ways in which men view themselves are often not conducive to seeing themselves in terms of child-minding. One commentator referred to ‘deeply ingrained cultural prejudices about male roles’ (Levine 1987); while another said that ‘[m]ost new fathers would probably feel great reluctance to take time off anyway. We are still largely creatures of traditional wisdom: you provide for your family by working hard and getting ahead’ (Kiechel 1986). Carlsen mentioned ‘[t]he significance of the man’s individual masculinity and…the importance of work as an identity-
creating factor’ as a crucial factor in understanding men’s willingness or otherwise to care for their children (Carlsen 1993, p. 86). As Russell put it: ‘Men are expected to be the breadwinners, and those who are not employed are subject to social criticism and self-doubts; men are not brought up to expect that they will spend a lot of time caring for children’ (Russell 1983b).

4.4 Workforce pressures

Moss argues that one of the main impediments to men spending more time with their children is ‘the pattern of male employment’. He points to ‘powerful interrelated forces’ increasingly segmenting the labour force into the unemployed, the under-employed and the over-employed. The latter’s privilege of secure, well-paid jobs comes at the price of an intensification of their work loads, while the family lives of the unemployed and under-employed cannot fail to be affected by poverty, stress and insecurity (Moss 1995, pp. xiv–xv). Smith cites a national cohort study in the UK of children born in 1970 that found 40 per cent of fathers did not get home from work until their children were asleep, and 11 per cent of those did not see their children on the weekends either (Smith 1995, p. 23).

4.5 Other reasons

Table 27 shows a number of reasons why men do not take parental leave, given by respondents to a 1990 survey of men’s use of parental leave in Denmark (Carlsen 1993, p. 81). The four main reasons given were: the mother needed all the available time (six months) for rest and recuperation and breastfeeding; there was no provision for leave at the father’s workplace; the possibility of the father’s taking leave had not occurred to them; and the family would lose income if the father took the leave instead of the mother.
Table 27: Reasons given for fathers not taking parental leave, Denmark, children born 1984–89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>By fathers (%)</th>
<th>By mothers (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother still breastfeeding</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not possible due to father’s work</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not considered</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial cost</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother is better carer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father not interested</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father doubtful of his ability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/not stated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Carlsen 1993, p. 81.

Clearly, mothers were more likely to give breastfeeding as the main reason; while fathers were more likely to cite financial reasons. In the case of the latter, Carlsen said the author of the survey had estimated that parents were likely to lose income if the father took leave in about 70 per cent of families. There would be no loss of income if the father were a public employee—all public-sector employees have had a right to full salary during leave since 1989. However, women are more likely than men to be public-sector employees (Carlsen 1993, p. 81). In the cases where the family had not even considered the possibility of the father taking leave, Carlsen suggested that part of the reason might be the still prevalent belief that mothers ought to take primary responsibility for the children. In the case of impediments due to the father’s work he commented that, although it was well recognised that this was one of the most significant influences on whether or not fathers took leave, there was little knowledge of why this might be so. It would seem from the results of the Danish Equal Status Council that workplaces were more favourable towards the two-week paternity leave than men taking any of the longer parental leave (Carlsen 1993, pp. 84–5).

Haas and Hwang suggest three reasons for the fall in the proportion of Swedish men who took leave to care for their children: budget cuts resulting in a the decline in the rate of compensation, from 90 per cent of average earnings to 75 per cent; closer official scrutiny of individuals taking leave; and men’s fears about jeopardising their jobs (Haas and Hwang 2000).
Some reasons why men do not take-up opportunities to care for their children
5 Some issues

McKie et al (2001) are pessimistic about the likelihood that paternity leave, or even family-friendly policies more generally, would have any great influence on what they called the current ‘gender template’. By this, they meant social expectations that caring ought to be predominantly a female domain and full-time paid employment a male one. As they put it: ‘The provision of unpaid paternity leave [in the UK] is unlikely to challenge the strong association between femininity, mothering and care work’ (McKie et al 2001, p. 233). They point out that government policy, even in the Scandinavian countries that are usually regarded as exemplary models in this respect and where paternity leave is paid (pp. 250–1), has tended to rely on notions of citizenship obligations defined in terms of participation in the paid workforce, while ignoring those ‘private’ obligations typically performed by women. The dominant idea that informs government policy is that the citizen’s obligations to society can be fulfilled only by paid employment, and not by any of the caring roles typically performed by women. These requirements, they argue, add to the obligations women already have, without doing anything to promote caring on the part of men. The authors do not deny the desirability of family-friendly policies, but point out that such policies in themselves do not challenge the existing domestic division of labour, and that they tend to be undermined by other aspects of workplace culture, especially in the service industries (p. 243). They conclude by calling for an approach that ‘highlights the importance of caring in the home, for society at large’ (p. 253).
Some issues
Part two: Case studies

6 Concepts guiding the research design

The available evidence suggests that fathers make little use of provisions that are believed to make the workplace more family-friendly. This research is designed to uncover the reasons for this low rate of take-up. Since there has been so little research into this topic, the appropriate form of research is small-scale, in-depth research relying on qualitative techniques. The broad purpose of the research is to be sufficiently non-directive and sensitive as to allow the subjects of the research to lead the investigators to the important issues. This type of research is typically undertaken as a preliminary to larger-scale research, as an aid to developing a questionnaire asking the most pertinent questions. This larger-scale study would then address the issue of estimating the prevalence of uptake by designing the sample to ensure representativeness.

For this exploratory study, the strategy developed in collaboration with FaCS and DEWR was to select two employers with strong credentials as work-family innovators. This approach is what Robert Stake calls an ‘instrumental case study’. By this, he means that the cases used to provide insights into the issue under investigation are not themselves the focus of intrinsic interest. They are used to facilitate our understanding of something else (2000, p. 437). In this sense, the two companies are of secondary interest.

They are drawn from disparate industries, with differing degrees of exposure to competition and business imperatives. The contrasting nature of the companies, their distinctive business environments and different policy settings provide an opportunity to study how these differences affect outcomes. Any lack of variation in outcomes is itself an important piece of information, since it offers the opportunity to develop generalisations that could be tested in a further, more detailed, phase of research.

Broadly, the study takes the form of a ‘process evaluation’. Process (or implementation) evaluation focuses on how a program was implemented and operates. Process evaluation begins by establishing the objectives of the program and its implementation plan. This includes deciding the particular evidence (such as the specific knowledge, attitudes, or behaviour) that will demonstrate that the objectives have been met. A set of clear, measurable, and realistic program objectives is the key to assessing the impact of the program. This research develops methods for identifying the procedures that are followed to implement the policy, and addresses the issue of whether the program was implemented as intended. Implementation evaluation gathers data on what actually transpires in a program and how closely it
resembles the program's goals. Establishing the extent and nature of program implementation is also an important first step in studying program outcomes; that is, it describes the interventions to which any findings about outcomes may be attributed. Process evaluation helps to assess reasons for successful or unsuccessful performance, that is, why the expected outcomes were or were not actually produced.

In Figure 1 below, the top of the program labelled ‘workplace policies’ represents the formal documents (statements of official company objectives, human resources policies, enterprise bargaining agreements, etc.) spelling out program objectives and planning for implementation. Below this label is the formal chain of implementation extending from senior management to the lowest levels of management and ultimately embedded in concrete workplace practices. Data was collected at key points in this management chain through semi-structured interviews with the appropriate managers and union officials, and focus groups with supervisors who were key participants in the implementation process. A number of scenarios, depicting conflict between work and family responsibilities, were used as trigger material in the focus groups. The scenarios were: attending a school prize-giving ceremony during office hours; the birth of a new child into family where both parents are in paid employment; and a clash between parents’ hours of work and after-school hours care. The details of the characteristics of interviewees and focus group participants, and examples of interview schedules and focus group discussion guides, are given in Appendix 1.

The end of the chain of implementation represents the behaviour of the employees for whom the policies are intended. In theory, this would be the point at which to conduct an outcome evaluation, measuring the differences in prevalence of fathers’ use of company provisions. However, conducting a full-scale outcome evaluation was beyond the scope of this exploratory research. Data on the behaviour of male employees with at least one child under 16 years of age was gathered from two perspectives, by convening focus groups from among the male employees themselves and from among the partners of this category of employees. The discussion guides for both these focus groups used similar scenarios to those used in the supervisors’ focus group. The aim was to tease out the particular attitudes and experiences of the different parties in order to come to a greater understanding of the ways in which work-life issues are negotiated and resolved, and particularly to understand men’s use in light of this. Information about the composition of focus groups can be found in Appendix 1.

The other elements in Figure 1 represent the context within which the program intervention takes place. Some of these represent the environment in which the company operates. These are elements of the situation that are outside the companies’ direct control. Other elements are endogenous to the company itself. These are elements of the organisation culture—beliefs and practices shared by employees—that are not the conscious creation of policy, but have nevertheless developed within the organisation over time. Finally, there are the constraints and influences employees bring into the situation as a result of being members of family
households. These households operate according to their own normative precepts and are organised around their own internal allocations of money and time resources. While company programs are intended to maximise the positive spill-over (and minimise the negative spill-over) from family to work, family households are not the direct creation of company policy and act as a significant aspect of the context in which work-family programs are implemented.

Figure 1: Conceptual map of research on Fathers’ uptake
Concepts guiding the research design
7 Company number one

7.1 Introduction

Company number one is a metal product manufacturer in a state capital city. It is the Australian subsidiary of a multinational company and has been operating in the country for about 75 years.

The parent company assigns a different model of the product to each national company. As a consequence, the market position of any branch of the company depends on the market position of the model allocated to that branch, and not to the success of the company’s products worldwide. So the strong market position of any particular model doesn’t mean that the Australian arm of the company is doing well. If the model produced here is not popular, there is no benefit for the Australian operations of other more popular models. A lot depends on the new model currently being developed, especially as the last major product release did not meet expectations.

In the mid-1990s, the company was number one in Australia, but it is now in third place after its two direct market competitors. There have been significant job cuts in the recent past, and the company has been threatened with closure. Hence, resources are very tight. A minor but telling example of this resource deficiency was the significance of the refreshments for the participants at the focus groups and the gratitude with which they were received, as there are no tea- or coffee-making facilities freely available to employees.

The company’s work is based around natural work groups that meet once per week, and the production line is shut down to enable these meetings to occur.

7.2 A family-friendly company?

It was generally agreed by participants from all the different groups researched—from senior management through to the union, employees’ partners and the men themselves—that the company was family-oriented.

Partly, this perception arose from the fact that many of its workers came from families that have worked for the company for several generations. A HR manager said it used to be the case, ‘in the old days’, that employees’ relatives would be called on to help out in busy times, and that ‘there are a lot of sons, daughters, nephews, nieces that have come through’ the company in that way (HR Manager Three). Moreover, a number of the research participants themselves had worked for the company for over 20 years.
The annual family day at Christmas was also mentioned at numerous points in the research as being indicative of the company's family orientation. This was obviously a significant symbolic focus of the family-friendliness of the company.

There was a broad range of views on the significance of the company's concern for employees' well-being and the extent to which this concern was realised through policy development and implementation.

Management

The key benefits of being a family-friendly company were not only understood, but also advocated at the highest level. A HR manager said that, in her view, there was an awareness amongst management that investing in people was often more worthwhile than investing in high-tech equipment. She also felt that 'people are respected, their needs are listened to. We try very, very hard to...keep our people, to support our people'. She admitted that the company was 'not quite there in a whole lot of ways' in providing 'the best environment' for its employees. She said they would 'get there' if the company kept 'travelling the road we're travelling on' (HR Manager Three).

Another HR manager was not sure that the company was self-motivated in its introduction of family-friendly policies. She attributed the company's interest to what she referred to as 'external influences' (by which she meant external to management, not external to the company as a whole). She saw employee expectations as a major driver of policy. She also saw it in terms of a generational shift. What 'the current generation of people having families...are expecting and wanting', including people in management, will be what becomes ingrained into the organisation, she said (HR Manager One).

A vice-president was cautiously optimistic about the company's commitment to initiatives like 'work-life balance, work life integration and family friendly policies', but he saw the company's approach as 'mixed'. He felt it was 'broadly supportive', but he would not go so far as to say that it was 'universally supportive of flexible work arrangements'. The trend was 'in the right direction', and the company had come 'a long way at in the last five, six, seven years', but there was still some way to go. What progress had been made, he felt, was largely the result of the company's 'strong culture of understanding and supporting diversity' (see below) (HR Manager Four).

The first HR Manager quoted above was unsure of how well the company's policies were working on the ground. On the one hand, she felt that supervisors and managers would probably 'hope that nobody would ask them' for access to flexible work arrangements, and they tended to leave decisions up to HR. On the other hand, the company had 'some great people who facilitate', as well as 'lots of good examples of it happening'. But, she said, 'it's unfortunate that the role-models are all female'. She also said supervisors had an important role because they were the 'communicators of all the polices and resources a person can tap into', as well as 'promoting [them] and offering innovative ways and...solutions'. But she wasn't sure if they always did this.
And while the company was looking at ways of ‘creating the business case for telecommuting or for job-sharing’, it had not yet done so.

Nonetheless, she thought one particular initiative—the company’s ‘personnel development committees’—was ‘a really great way to actually look at your resources’ and support employees to overcome whatever ‘gaps or issues’ they might have. These committees allowed ‘weaknesses, strengths, potential opportunities’ to be ‘discussed in a group’ and hence brought out into the open, rather than being dealt with on a one-to-one basis between manager and employee (HR Manager Three).

Another HR manager pointed out that flexible work arrangements had ‘to meet the business need’, and that if they did not, then ‘the supervisor of the area has the right to veto’. That wasn’t always the end of the matter, though, since HR still had a role to play (HR Manager One).

But, as a vice-president pointed out, although HR’s role might be ‘to challenge the management to think more broadly’, and ‘be an advocate for change’, it ‘shouldn’t be forcing decisions’ because it was important for supervisors to take responsibility for implementing policy (HR Manager Four).

**Employees**

The Union Representative felt that the company did ‘generally work hard to accommodate people’s lives and to be sensitive and kind’. She also pointed out that there were inconsistencies, that there were some areas where ‘staff bent over backwards to be flexible’, and others where the rules didn’t allow it. She felt that the company was making attempts to be responsive to the family needs of employees, including those on the shop floor (for the significance of this, see section 7.2). She cited the availability of phones on the shop floor for incoming emergency calls as an example of the company’s acknowledgement that ‘there is a family balance needed’ (Union Representative).

Participants in the male employees’ focus group also commented that there had been some effort by the company to address family responsibilities for employees on the shop floor. The annual shut-down of the production line, for example, is now scheduled in school holidays.

The Union Representative commented that, as far as she knew, there had never been any discussion in the company about what work and family meant. She felt this was a serious deficiency since she didn’t see how it was possible to address the issue if there was no clear perception of what it meant. However, she did feel that the company’s ‘Whole of Life’ surveys were an attempt to address this question. These were intended to assess the information and support needs of employees, any issues employees might have with the current provisions, and ways of tailoring provisions to better meet employees’ needs. The results were to be fed into the next Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA). (At the time of this research going to publication these were not available).
One male employee commented that working conditions had improved over the last five to 10 years, especially in relation to the flexibility of work hours to meet family needs. There was some agreement on this from among the group. Another participant said that, in 1995, his request for a rearrangement of some of his working hours had been flatly refused. He commented that there was no WorkLife policy in place then, and management were very strict about specific working hours—for example, he had to start at exactly 8.00 a.m. He felt that the same request would be easier now.

Another man retorted that conditions had been much better when he started to work for the company 16 years ago. At that time, overtime was paid, there were meal allowances for more than two hours overtime, and the workload was less. Another employee commented favourably on the flexi-time available where he had worked previously (with a direct competitor of this company). This prompted strong arguments in favour of introducing flexi-time into this company. Another employee said that things were better at this company (specifically in Product Development) than at his previous workplace.

Overall, employees did tend to feel that management was ‘more open and understanding these days’. However, sometimes experience conveyed quite a different message. For example, one male employee intended to take five weeks long service leave after the birth of twins, because he and his wife already had two children. Management had asked him to take home a laptop during that time to continue some work. He said he understood this, given the amount of work he would have to come back to, but he was also very concerned about how he was going to manage.

Another participant in the group responded by asking if they had relatives or friends who could help, although the discussion was explicitly directed towards ways in which the workplace could help create a better balance between work and family. In this case the workplace, far from offering support, actually imposed extra burdens, and yet the automatic reaction was to ask about personal/individual resources, not institutional ones supposedly provided by the company.

A participant in the supervisors’ focus group was sceptical about how far the company was prepared to go in encouraging take-up of family-friendly provisions. He could see there were many men who needed flexible working arrangements but who were reluctant to come forward and ask for them, either ‘because of reasons of culture’ or because of pressure from co-workers or supervisors. If that was going to change, he said, then ‘it really needs to be driven by management’. He didn’t think that was going to happen, though, because the company might be worried ‘that everyone’s going to take the flexibility up and it will be total chaos’.

**Partners**

The women in the partners’ group appreciated the fact that their husbands had ‘a bit of flexibility’ to meet family needs as they arose. In general, they were happy with the
family-friendly provisions the company had on offer, and they felt it was good of the company to make the provisions available.

They also felt, however, that it was not unreasonable to expect the company to be flexible, given the significant input their partners gave to the company as employees: ‘the guys put in a lot of extra time, you know, so if they want to have a little bit of time for the family…’.

The women also pointed out that having flexibility in the workplace was also of benefit to the business itself. One woman said, ‘Things would run better, they would get more out of their staff’. Other women agreed, pointing out that giving employees some leeway in taking time off would mean employees giving more time and effort to the company.

Some of the women contrasted the provisions at this company favourably with those at other workplaces, with one woman commenting that ‘a lot of other companies you get absolutely nothing’.

Not all the women agreed. One woman thought that the company was not wholly committed to family-friendly values, and that they had been forced into it by external pressures. She said, ‘To be a leading, upfront company they’ve had to’. Another woman disagreed, saying she really felt the company was committed to family values because it had sacked an employee who had been using the internet for pornography. The first woman also had reasons for her scepticism about the family focus of the company. She gave the example of those long-term workers, her father included, who had been made redundant from one day to the next.

Another woman felt that what flexibility the company did offer was too good to last, given the reality of economic constraints. While it might be able to offer flexible work arrangements in the short term, she felt it was ‘asking too much’ to expect it to do so in the long term when its own survival might very well be at stake.

Not having a flexible work environment was clearly identified by some members of the group as the reason they were no longer in paid employment. One woman said her employers had ‘made it very, very difficult’ for her when she returned to work after maternity leave. ‘I don’t think employers really realise how much pressure they put on people’, she commented.

When work is not supportive of family needs, mothers feel that they need to give up paid work to look after their children themselves. If workplaces cannot support families through those times when formal child care does not work in the short term, such as a child’s illness, then families have to re-evaluate their care arrangements. This usually means women giving up paid work, reducing their hours or changing to nightshift, to take up most of the care-giving.

Different environments

Company number one is divided into different working environments along two separate axes. First, there is the division between salaried employees and those paid
by the hour. This is also a division between ‘white collar’, professional staff (those in product development, administration, finance, marketing, HR, etc.) and ‘blue collar’ staff who work on the production line and actually build the product on the shop floor. (There was a similar division at company number two—see section 13.2. Whitehouse and Zetlin also found the same kind of division in a manufacturing company included in their study of family-friendly policies and practices in six workplaces) (Whitehouse and Zetlin 1999, p. 232).

Cutting across this division is the division into two different production worksites, each of which has both manufacturing plants and salaried employees. According to the union representative, there are ‘cultural differences’ between the two sites, ‘almost like two different companies’. As a consequence, although the policies are the same throughout the company, they have been taken up in different ways in each of the two sites.

At the worksite where this research was undertaken (site A), there is a higher ratio of salaried employees to production workers than at site B, largely because head office is located here. As well, the plant at site B is the main employer in the area where it is located. Coupled with recent job-cuts and a high level of unemployment in the area, there is a tangible workplace culture of job insecurity. As a consequence, employees tend to give the highest priority to keeping their jobs, whatever the cost, with little interest or energy left over for what might be perceived under the circumstances to be optional extras, such as family-friendly initiatives. The cost is a work and family balance weighted heavily in favour of work.

The upshot of these two divisions within the company is that access to family-friendly provisions and workplace flexibility is heavily dependent on where employees are situated. In relation to the two different work sites, site A is clearly more family-friendly than site B, both because there are more salaried staff there and hence more employees who can take up opportunities for flexibility, and because workers at this worksite are less subject to job insecurity. So while the policies may be the same across the company, there are differences of implementation at the different worksites.

All informants were agreed that flexibility was less available to workers on the production line than to salaried staff. As the union representative described it, ‘your entire production process is bound to certain times and the whole process fitting together, so everybody being there at certain times’. She went on to say the difficulties are exacerbated by the introduction of ‘just-in-time’ production. There used to be some flexibility on the production line because there was a store of component parts held ready to hand in warehouses. Now, the parts don’t arrive until they are needed in the assembly process. Since everything arrives at exactly the right time, the workers have to be there at the same time or the process can’t continue. As the union representative pointed out:

“Family-friendly”…relies on a certain degree of flexibility, and one of the difficulties is that in the manufacturing environment that flexibility is a lot
less, especially now that we have just-in-time production. Each part of the entire manufacturing process is reliant on the other parts, you can’t afford to have someone start an hour later.

She went on to say that there was ‘a lot more flexibility’ in ‘the human resources, admin., product development type environment’ because the work didn’t demand that people be there at certain fixed times. In her view, the organisation of work in the production area was the company’s ‘biggest problem’:

They’ve gone quite gung-ho with a whole lot of family-friendly ideas for salaried staff, because they assume that flexibility and provide that flexibility for them. But as soon as you say, “Well, what about on the factory floor?” they go, “Oh, it doesn’t apply”. So they don’t assume that it should apply (Union Representative).

This places obvious limits on production employees’ flexibility, since they cannot leave the line at a moment’s notice to deal with family emergencies. Participants in the supervisors’ focus group said that supervisors in the production area needed to obtain approval for any variation in hours for these employees, because there were overtime rules and tight control of start and finish times. In talking about the use of flexi-time for attending to a family commitment, a HR manager noted that ‘the only place that you probably can’t do that as well is in the plant, and that is really only on the line’ (HR Manager One).

Employees were also keen to stress that the availability of flexibility is unequal across the different areas of the company. It was ‘much more difficult for workers on the line’, they said. It was therefore a lot harder to balance life and work in the production areas of the company (Male employees’ focus group).

When it is considered that these workers comprise approximately two-thirds of the workforce (3600 hourly workers, compared with 1300 to 1400 salaried), there are significant implications for the company’s overall family-friendliness.

Some HR managers recognised the existence of the division, but saw it as belonging in the ‘too hard basket’. The success of the policies was therefore evaluated only with reference to those for whom they were available (i.e. salaried staff). The issue of how to increase the flexibility of the other two-thirds of the workforce tied to the production line was not tackled head-on. This was a criticism raised by the union, and a concern shared by employees as well.

The distinction between salaried and hourly staff is not an absolute one, with all the flexibility on one side and none on the other. In fact, there is a certain amount of leeway available to production line staff. A HR manager pointed out that, in the EBA with regard to the ‘hourly population’, there is ‘a fair bit of flexibility in leave provisions and how they are used’, that people can ‘move their leave around’, and that they ‘have
obvious things like maternity, parental leave. She also noted that the company was ‘fairly flexible about how a person used their holiday leave, for example’, and that they could use leave ‘to cope with emergencies that come up’ (HR Manager Three).

The Union Representative also pointed out that flexible working arrangements were legally required for production line employees on WorkCover who had returned to work after a workplace injury, and that that set a precedent for flexibility for other reasons.

Nonetheless, it remains largely the case that there are provisions available in some sections of company but not in others, so much so that some informants asked whether this research was looking at salaried staff, hourly-paid staff or both. In fact, the research did not include hourly-paid employees, so it is not representative of their experience. This is an important issue for research at this company, since it raises the question of whether the research brief was male employees as a whole, or whether it was particular categories of male employees (in this case, professionals in Product Development). While it might seem that the brief was male employees overall, it was also directed towards workplaces that had family-friendly policies and provisions in place. To the extent that the production line at this company is not such a workplace (a point that was stressed by participants throughout the research), does that justify confining the research to those areas offering flexible provisions? When this question was put to the union representative, she agreed that it made sense ‘because family-friendly provisions rely on a flexible environment’.

Differences in the availability of family-friendly provisions constitute a significant overall finding of this research. For a considerable proportion of employees, family-friendly provisions either are not available or are less available than to other sections of the workforce. The division within the company, between professional, salaried employees and production line workers paid by the hour, was also a distinction between those with a comparative ease of access to flexibility of working hours and those for whom this was more difficult. This distinction was also found at company number two (see section 13.2).

**Unions**

The Union Representative was from the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU). As a consequence, an issue of immediate concern to her was that she mostly represented employees in production, rather than the engineers, etc., in Product Development where most of our research was conducted. She was not sure, she said, ‘that we’d be talking about the same group’, given that her knowledge of the company ‘would be from the manufacturing workers, not so much from Product Development’.

She said the union had set the agenda for the work and family initiatives in the last EBA negotiations. The company was largely reliant on the union for this, except for ‘issues like telecommuting and part-time work’ which were company initiatives. (According to management, the union was deliberately excluded from the design of these initiatives, called ‘flexible work options’—see section 8.2.)
One of the key concerns for the union was the differential access to provisions discussed above, and what the union felt was the company’s lack of interest in and commitment to exploring how flexibility can be made available to workers in the production area. The union representative said they had had difficulty even getting hold of the company who ‘didn’t see it as an issue for us’ because ‘production workers wouldn’t take it up’. She said the fact that the company ‘don’t think about that in terms of the majority of the workforce’ was ‘a bit sad really’.

Other key union concerns involved the resources to back up the provisions, and employees’ lack of knowledge of them.

One of the HR managers seemed to think that the union was not altogether favourably disposed towards flexible work arrangements; that they tended to see it as a surreptitious way of introducing more casualisation of the workforce. She saw a need to operate ‘on a one-by-one basis’ and ‘to tread fairly warily’ as a consequence of what she perceived as ‘some angst’ on the part of the union (HR Manager Three).

There seemed to be some support for this view from a statement from the union representative to the effect that, ‘You can’t afford to undermine jobs by creating this flexibility’. But the union’s concern is to protect working conditions, ‘maintaining labour levels for the benefit of everyone and maintaining full-time jobs’. Their resistance to accepting uncritically everything the company proposed was based on the need ‘to protect the conditions of the workers generally’ and ‘to maintain the labour levels’.

Rather than trying to meet specific individual needs as isolated cases, the chief way the company recommends providing flexibility, the union is trying to develop initiatives for employees generally. That need not translate into antagonism towards flexibility as long as working conditions are not being threatened.
8 Policy

8.1 Diversity

Management couched support for flexibility in terms of support for diversity. ‘Diversity’ originally meant policy initiatives designed to retain women in the workforce. As one HR manager said:

It was very much a global drive within [the company] that we had to increase the diversity of our workforce, and in particular the number of women within the workforce and the number of women in management …we were losing women who were going off to have babies and weren't coming back, and that's because we weren't that receptive, it was too hard for us to organise part-time work.

She went on to say that, while diversity had been a discussion point at the company for some time, it was only once measurement of key indicators was introduced that it really became an issue on the company’s agenda:

Companies don’t necessarily do things because it’s the right thing to do. But if you start to measure [things], it actually does make a difference … I think once you start measuring those sorts of statistics, it does force people to really think about what they can do (HR Manager One).

The company has for a long time had a Diversity Council in each of its branches in all the countries it operates in. This is a joint union/company initiative with members from the unions and the salaried staff, together with the Vice-President Human Resources. It is facilitated by an external organiser. It meets quarterly and makes decisions about the diversity program. There is also a WorkLife Taskforce which is a sub-committee of the Council. There are specific resources allocated for Diversity and Work and Family Life projects, which equal one full-time equivalent position at each of the two manufacturing sites.

The Union Representative saw this Council as an attempt by the company to put some steps in place to consult with the union:

I think they’ve provided an opportunity to learn and they’ve shown a willingness to learn and to raise the issues and discuss them…We jointly convene that Council and that forms the opportunity to discuss issues and come out with ideas of how to do it (Union Representative).
8.2 Formal policy

**Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA)**

*Background*

Information on the EBA is taken from the company's *2000 Enterprise Agreement Summary Booklet*, and from interviews and focus group discussions. The current EBA is valid to July 2003 (or after that date until new agreement has been negotiated). It is jointly signed by the Vice-President Human Resources and the Chairperson of the relevant union.

*Work and family*

Under the general heading of 'Work and Family', the EBA outlines the commitment of both the company and the union to three principles behind 'sustaining a workplace that seeks to encourage diversity':

- a zero tolerance policy on harassment and unlawful discrimination
- valuing and support for a diverse workplace, with specific reference to women's participation and experience of being employed at the company
- fostering an environment recognising the diverse needs of employees, and 'allowing them to contribute their maximum at work while at the same time fulfilling their personal and family responsibilities'.

*Leave*

A number of leave provisions are outlined with reference to work and family responsibilities. Along with bereavement leave, there is:

- family leave—'Family leave is defined as absences to provide care and support due to the illness of a partner, child or parent'. Employees can use their current year's sick leave (10 days) as family leave, plus up to seven days of accrued sick leave if they have been with the company for more than a year. A medical certificate is required unless uncertificated sick leave credits are being used. In effect, these family leave provisions amount to different ways of using sick leave.
- paternity leave—up to five days from an employee's current or accrued entitlement of sick or family leave upon the birth of their child
- maternity leave—six weeks at the normal rate of pay for employees with 12 months continuous service. It is compulsory whether paid or not.

*Paternity leave*

On the whole, the HR Managers interviewed believed that paternity leave was widely accepted within the company, although that depended on the length of time men wanted to take. While the five-day period provided for in the EBA was relatively unproblematic, lengthy periods of time off tended to be seen as detrimental to career progression. Regarding men who take time off work to care for children, one HR manager said:
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

I guess they would tend to be the people who I would probably...characterise as being less personally ambitious. Obviously that's their choice...I mean, if we had one of their top performing employees who's got huge potential and was getting promoted very rapidly, they would equally be able to [take time off]. But...if people are ambitious, they would see that as potentially taking time out of their careers...it's likely to inhibit the opportunities that are open to them, just being at the right place where there's an opportunity, or the right time where there's an opportunity.

He said that, 'from the company's point of view, anybody that applies would be treated equally regardless of whether they're regarded as high potential'. But he thought that 'ambition may well be a feature’ in men's reluctance to take time out to care for their children (HR Manager Two).

The Union Representative said that the next round of EBA negotiations would include the possibility of changing the conditions under which men could take leave to care for children (which would still be unpaid). The proposal is to extend the period during which the leave can be taken to five years, rather than one year as at present. This would be an improvement, she said, particularly for production workers who may need to 'recover' from the loss of income occurring at the time of the baby's birth (e.g. their partner leaving the workforce, the additional costs of setting up for a baby) before they would be in a position to take unpaid leave. She said that paid maternity leave provisions had only been introduced fairly recently (1996). Such provisions were rare in production industries, but as women were only 10 per cent of the workforce, the company could far more easily afford the six weeks maternity pay than they could paid paternity leave (Union Representative).

The male employees’ partners were unsure whether or not the company actually had any paternity leave provisions. The question gave rise to some discussion. Most participants thought their partners could take three days off following the birth of a child:

Yeah, sorry, they do have three days. I forgot about that. Because [my husband] had three days off when this one was born.

They were unsure, however, whether or not employees could take extended long-term leave with their positions held open for them (as was the case with maternity leave).

Flexible Work Options Policies

The Flexible Work Options Policies relate to job-sharing, part-time work (including staged retirement), and telecommuting. The policies were initiated by the company itself, without consulting the union. This was a deliberate strategy on the company’s part:

We've tried to keep [these policies] out of the negotiated arena...These sorts of things have been discussed in enterprise bargaining, but basically
we've tried to do it as something we just want to offer employees without...the baggage that goes with that from a union point of view (HR Manager Two).

The policies were very new at the time this research was conducted and had not become widespread. However, according to a HR manager, where they had been introduced they were working well:

The fact that we have official flexible work options really means that...we do have people who telecommute, we do have people on part-time arrangements, we do have job-share, probably not as many as we'd like, but we know it's been growing slowly over the last couple of years, and the more people we have in place, and the more great role models of how that works, you know, the better it is. For example, in Product Development, one of the senior managers there, their PA is a job-share arrangement...it's such a seamless arrangement that you kind of forget when you only have occasional dealings with them. They've worked that out so well that you forget it's two people...because it all just happens...So we need more of those that lead the way for others. (HR Manager Three).

The policies are based on US models. They were officially launched in December 2001 although, as a vice-president pointed out, there were already a number of people using such flexible work options beforehand, and the company had ‘been migrating towards them [on] a pilot basis for some time before that’ (HR Manager Four).

The original pilot flexibility program, LifeWork, was trialed only in the Product Development area. The company subsequently introduced WorkLife, a broader program focusing on balancing work and life more generally, rather than just family. This has the advantage that it can offer something to all employees; but there is a worry that crucial concerns for employees with families could become blurred and less relevant. Some male employees argued, for example, that ‘WorkLife Week’ and its focus on ‘life’ generally did not address what was their main life concern outside work, that is, the fact that they were fathers. One participant commented, amidst laughter from the rest of the group, that he didn’t have time for scuba diving.

As pointed out earlier (section 7.2), not all work and family initiatives are for all staff. One manager identified ‘WorkLife Week’ and the ‘Whole of Life’ surveys as initiatives available to both salaried and hourly workers. But the formal flexibility policies are in practice available only to salaried staff. Moreover, informal flexibility negotiated between employee and supervisor (varying starting and finishing times, going home early to go to a special school function, etc.) is also available only to salaried staff, although the arrangements work well in this case. One HR manager admitted that it was not necessarily a good thing and that there was a need to do something about it,
but that it was the reality at present:

> From the point of view of our salaried population...looking at it very superficially, they have much more flexibility in that [there are] individual arrangements that the company has with them and theoretically they can be covered by a whole range of flexible work options. We have an official Flexible Work Options Policy so there is...the potential for a lot of flexibility. But the reality is that it is a "face-time" culture, and you know we're working our way through that (HR Manager Three).

**Job-sharing**

Job-sharing was generally viewed favourably. The union were supportive because they saw it as a means of providing flexibility without increasing the workload burden on the rest of the work group, while at the same time maintaining staffing levels. The union representative said she had had experience of job-sharing in the past and she supported it: ‘You basically leave it to the two workers to sort it out. They can come and go as they like as long as [the work’s] covered’.

Management were also in favour, and it is company policy. One of the Vice-Presidents clearly articulated the benefits to the company:

> In a job-share situation you get...two people with two sets of experience bases, two skill sets, two brains...two ways of looking at the world that are doing one job, and you can often accomplish a lot more because of that (HR Manager Four).

However, up to the time of this research it had not been widely introduced. According to the Union Representative, it was all very new. Although there were advocates for job-sharing throughout the manufacturing industry, ‘it’s not something that we’ve actually pulled together and really promoted strongly’, and so far the company ‘haven’t moved at all’ on it.

The company did have some employees who were job-sharing, but the examples given were all women:

> There’s a couple of ladies here that do job-share...I don’t know of any men that do, but I know of a few ladies that do (Male employees’ focus group).

The male employees and their partners tended to be less favourably disposed towards job-sharing than management. One man did seem to think it was possible because there were some jobs that could be split in half and made into job-sharing positions. Others in the group disagreed, saying that extra staff would be needed and there was no extra staff: ‘But you need another head, where’s the other head? It doesn’t exist’. Another man doubted that positions in a high-pressure environment like product development could be shared.
The men’s partners thought job-sharing could be useful, but it was simply not feasible unless the family were already financially secure and that was unlikely to be the case when the children were young. Hence, none of these women saw job-sharing as a possibility for their partners.

It would seem, then, that any new job-sharing positions would continue to be taken up only by women. This is confirmed by the company’s recent experience of recruiting specifically for a job-share position. Despite trying several different avenues of recruitment, they found that only women applied (HR Manager Three).

While it is significant that there is widespread support for job-sharing arrangements, from the union as well as from management, there are good reasons why men do not undertake part-time positions. As the main income providers for their families, men cannot afford to take up any flexible option that reduces income to less than full-time pay. Furthermore, any option involving less than full-time work is likely to have a negative impact on career progression. (These constraints on men’s take-up of job-sharing and other family-friendly provisions in company number one are explored further in section 12.) As well, there are some positions which do not lend themselves to being shared. Although these are difficulties that will not be resolved in the short-term, having a broad support base for such a policy is a positive sign. It does mean that areas potentially suitable for job-sharing can be identified and the provision more actively promoted.

**Telecommuting**

Telecommuting, too, is company policy and supported by management although, as one HR manager pointed out, it was as yet available only ‘in pockets of the organisation’ (HR Manager One).

Once again, employees and their partners were ambivalent. On the one hand, there were those in the male employees’ focus group who insisted that it was not possible to work and look after kids at the same time. As one man put it, ‘You couldn’t get any work done at home with children’. What was needed to balance life and work, they argued, was to work fewer hours. There was a fair amount of agreement on this point. On the other hand, there were those who saw being able to work from home as something the company could do to increase flexibility, as long as it was properly set up (for example, being able to get into the company’s system from a home computer/laptop). This suggestion was met with dissent from others.

There was some agreement that, at a minimum, access to emails from home would be an advantage, particularly at times when only slight changes in working hours were required, e.g. starting work an hour later. One participant was concerned that that would only further impinge on family life.

There were also mixed feelings in the partners’ focus group. One woman said her husband had some interest in working from home, and that is why he had brought home the laptop. She said she liked the idea, but not until the children were much
older. It would work if she was working part-time, for example, and telecommuting meant her partner could work from home if their child was sick. But the child would need to be old enough to not need 100 per cent attention. She felt it was not a suitable arrangement when there were young children.

Several women indicated they didn’t want their husbands at home during the day, because they wouldn’t be able to relax (for example, while the children were sleeping). And one woman said, ‘Not work from home. I like being home by myself sometimes’.

There were also mixed feelings in the supervisors’ focus group about telecommuting (although for different reasons). One participant pointed out that telecommuting was in conflict with the ‘face-time’ culture at the company. ‘There is a perception’, he said, ‘that if you’re not in the office, then you’re not working’. Others held the view that employees were often more efficient and got more done at home.

There was some discussion in the male employees’ focus group of a woman, currently on maternity leave, who will be having a line set up at home to telecommute part of the time when she gets back to work. One of the first responses from the group to this information was to ask, ‘Is that a rumour?’ This indicates how few examples of these policies employees have seen in practice, and hence how far the company still has to go in implementing them.

One participant in the partners’ focus group said her husband sometimes brought a laptop home to do a few hours work if he had to look after the children. Another woman said her husband checked his email at home, even when he was on leave, ‘because when he comes back to work they’re all there, you know 1000 emails or so’. Another woman commented that he must be ‘a workaholic’. The first woman said, ‘He’s not really, it’s just out of necessity’. This raises the issue of the workload (see below). It would seem that even some of the employees’ partners accept that checking emails at home on top of a 12-hour working day may be necessary to get the job done.

Part-time work
A HR manager believed that ‘part-time options that allow reduced working hours’ were ‘the most obvious and the most significant’ way in which the company was creating a better balance between working life and family life. She felt they were ‘not widely used across organisation as yet’. But, she said, ‘they’re certainly available and are being used more heavily in particular areas than others’ (HR Manager One).

She could foresee problems with it, largely because ‘our sheer workload’ might put further pressure on other members of the work group and give rise to resentment:

Having part-timers in your work group does actually put a bit more pressure on the rest of the group and that’s a fairly real thing. Just how do you manage that? How do you deal with [the fact] that…they’re not here five days a week so other people end up [doing more]. Especially…in the face-to-face type of area, other people will come to you because the other
person’s not there. So probably the impact that that could have on the rest of the group [could be a problem] (HR Manager One).

One male employee saw problems for part-time work arising from the nature of the work itself:

In terms of the jobs that we do, there wouldn’t seem to be much opportunity for it. I mean how can you be a design engineer part-time? You can’t. You just can’t (Male employees’ focus group).

### 8.3 Informal arrangements

As well as the company’s official Flexible Work Options Policies, there are informal arrangements enabling employees to maintain a balance between work and family life. A HR manager mentioned the use of flexi-time to deal with family commitments, a use she felt had ‘changed over recent years’. She also mentioned the possibility of working on a weekend day to make up for time off during the week (HR Manager One).

Another HR manager discussed arrangements for varying start and finish times in order to fit family commitments into the working day:

Informally we can do other flexible things…some people prefer to come in a little later because they want to maybe see their children in the morning, and [to] work a little later in the evening.

He said these changes in the normal working day were arranged by individual employees with their managers or supervisors, and that ‘it’s really just an attitude thing’ — a willingness to see that such arrangements were possible (HR Manager Two).

The scheduling of meetings was mentioned as one of the more obvious informal arrangements that could help in balancing work and family. As a HR manager put it, arrangements allowing people ‘to get away early or come in a bit later’ were all well and good, but ‘if people have got important meetings that are critical for them doing their job at 5.30 in the evening or 7.30 in the morning, that’s not realistic’. He felt that meetings should be treated as ‘a core activity rather than just trying to load it on to everything else that people do’ (HR Manager Two).

**The role of immediate supervisors**

Supervisors have a great deal of discretion in negotiating changes to employees’ working hours. As one participant stated, ‘We have total flexibility almost to use our judgement to come up with some kind of arrangement’. This was formalised in the 1996 EBA.
A HR manager pointed out that, since supervisors played such a key role in implementing flexible working arrangements, they must be accepting of them. If they are not committed, or at least supportive, then ‘it’s not going to happen’. They also have an important role in promoting those arrangements amongst the work team (HR Manager One).

Another HR manager agreed that the role of supervisors was ‘very significant’, because they were both ‘communicators of all the polices and resources a person can tap into’, and responsible for ‘promoting those and offering innovative ways and offering solutions for their employees’. She went on to say that she was not sure they always did do these things. She thought that, ‘for a number of our supervisors, managers, you know they don’t see themselves in that role’ (HR Manager Three).

A vice-president also agreed about the importance of immediate supervisors in implementing policy:

They have a big role…because one of the things that has to be decided is: Can this flexible strategy work in that job?…The supervisor has to buy into that, they have to be a part of that decision-making process…The last thing you want is where something got shoved down their throat and they’re not supportive of it…Plus the immediate employee, the supervisor and the manager of the area are in the best position to really evaluate what can work and what can’t work…HR shouldn’t step in and say, “Nope, you’re going to do it this way”, because then you won’t have the ownership…for it to actually work, [and] it will end up in a disaster (HR Manager Four).

One supervisor admitted that having children himself had changed not only his attitude towards workplace flexibility, but also his ability to implement it because it made him look differently at the experiences of employees he supervised. He said that, prior to having his own children, he had thought he understood the difficulties. He realised now that he had tended simply to react. Now, he said, he was ‘more proactive’—‘I go and find out how the children are…consciously…remember more of the children and where the children are up to’.

Informants were not sure that the increasing discretion being given to supervisors was always a good thing. One supervisor felt that, while it meant that some supervisors made the effort to be flexible, others did not:

I think there’s a feeling that some people tend to want to go by the book, and there is less and less of a book to go by now. And it’s really difficult, so they just say “no” to things. [On the other hand] there are other people that are more prepared to try and find a balance.
Participants in the partners’ focus group felt that supervisory discretion could be an impediment to flexibility at times because there were ‘some particular people in particular positions who are very inflexible’. The group discussed ways of going beyond the immediate supervisor if necessary. As one woman commented, ‘it still is uncomfortable and not what you expect to have in your work’.

The male employees also cited examples of particularly inflexible supervisors and the impact this had on work and life balance. One man spoke about a supervisor who had used his influence to ruin an employee’s leave arrangements. In contrast, another man said his supervisor tried to respect employees’ decisions about taking time off, by insisting on knowing only when they need to take time off, not why. On the whole, employees tended to agree that, while supervisor discretion had been a significant barrier in the past, management was generally more open and accessible these days.

**Problems with informal arrangements**

Informal arrangements can give rise to problems. They can mean that decisions and their consequences are, as one HR manager put it, ‘much more difficult to track’ to ensure that decisions are fair. The Union Representative gave the example of a female employee who had negotiated an arrangement with one supervisor, only to find it was overturned when the original supervisor was replaced with another one.

Supervisors felt that their discretion was tempered by the need to make decisions that were defensible in the sense that they were based on employees’ work records. They expressed a lack of certainty about the actual rules, and sometimes felt pressured to ‘make it happen’:

> There’s a lot of stress on supervisors because we’re the ones that have to make it work, not management.

Many said they often did not feel equipped with the knowledge and resources. They saw HR systems adding to their difficulties in negotiation, to the extent that those systems were antiquated and unable to deal with the changes in standards. As one supervisor put it, ‘Lots of times you’ve got to cheat the system to make the thing go’.

One supervisor said that HR had at times vetoed decisions without really understanding the critical issues involved. He said he knew he sometimes made mistakes, but he had to have ‘the opportunity to make the decisions, make the call and live by it’:

> So authority, HR...they don’t understand all the fine details and they’re just making hard and fast black and white rules, and that doesn’t work (Supervisors’ focus group).
9 The benefits of work-life balance

9.1 Attracting staff

Management clearly felt that family-friendly policies were instrumental in attracting employees to work for the company. A HR manager said that there was ‘a good business case for doing it’ in the sense that family-friendly policies meant that the company was ‘seen as an employer that people want to work for’. Attracting the widest possible range of people was important, he said, because:

ideally we would want the workforce to reflect the consumer base that we're serving...that's when you obviously get the value of all sorts of different perspectives and circumstances in developing our products to meet people's needs (HR Manager Two).

A vice-president also thought that people were ‘more and more interested in what kinds of flexible employment arrangements there are’, and that it was something ‘prospective employees are going to be looking at more and more’. He also felt there was a ‘strong business case’ involved in the company being ‘an employer of choice’, and that ‘if people understand that the company is interested in working with them to make it work for them...it has an intangible benefit in the organisation as well’ (HR Manager Four).

9.2 Retaining staff

Management also saw retaining staff as another benefit of a flexible workplace. A HR manager said that that was one factor motivating the company to introduce its flexible work policies: ‘We were losing women who were going off to have babies and weren’t coming back and that’s because we weren’t that receptive’ (HR Manager One).

A vice-president said that one of the chief benefits of flexibility was ‘definitely retention’, that ‘for sure, we would be losing really good employees if we didn’t provide flexibility for them to stay and maintain their skills and contribution’. He said that introducing the policies had ‘kept a lot of good employees with us who otherwise probably would have left’ (HR Manager Four).

Not all of those good employees were women. A HR manager gave the example of a valued male employee who probably would have left the company if he had not had help with his family issues:

He didn’t quite say, “I wouldn’t have been here”. But he wouldn’t have been here because he couldn’t have managed it (HR Manager Three).
9.3 Happy employees

Policies likely to attract and retain employees are also policies likely to keep employees content with their working conditions. The HR Manager who spoke above about the business case for attracting a wide diversity of people to work for the company, also spoke about needing to ‘maintain positive relationships with our employees’ (HR Manager Two). Hence, flexibility is mutually beneficial for both employees and the business. In support of the aim of finding out what employees want, the company has ‘done a number of surveys over time about asking people what it is that they do value in terms of flexible arrangements’ (HR Manager Two).
10 Balancing work and family

Because the women in the partners’ focus group were not the actual partners of the men in the employees’ focus group (see Appendix 1), the comparisons between the two groups are limited. Different information from each group, on family responsibilities and the roles each partner played in meeting them, for example, or on how decisions around work and family are negotiated, may reflect this difference in the focus group samples.

10.1 Male employees’ family responsibilities

Male employees’ perspectives

All the men agreed that their main responsibility was to try to be available to their families when needed, and that they were often unable to be there as much as they would like. One participant commented that the family being together as ‘one complete unit’ involving both parents, such as when they went away on holidays together, was important for the children’s sense of belonging in the family: ‘the kids feel bonding with the family that way’.

A number of participants reflected on the fact that having a family had meant increased responsibilities. ‘You can’t be as carefree’, said one man. ‘You’ve always got something, you don’t stop’, said another. Others agreed that there had been changes in their priorities since having children, that doing ‘social things’ had become less important and ‘your family type of things’ more important.

Participants also mentioned teaching children by involving them in what the fathers themselves were doing:

It’s good to take the time to show them what you’re doing and how you do it. You don’t get much done that way but they get a lot out of it.

One father said that he made a special effort to spend time with his two-year-old who was ‘developing so quickly’:

So you tend to want to finish work early so you can get home, be with them, play with them and that sort of stuff.

One participant in the group saw his role, at least in part, in terms of providing the children with ‘balance’ since they were with his wife all day. He noted that this was something his own father had not done:

I like to be there in the evenings to get involved, even if it’s bathing and stories and bed and that sort of interaction. At least they’ve got a couple
of hours with me. Even though they've had, say, eight or 10 hours or whatever it is with her, it provides a bit of balance. For me it's really important because my father didn't do that, and to me that's something that I really think is important that I want to do for my kids.

A number of participants said they would like to spend as much time with their children as their wives did, but that they could not do so for financial reasons, mainly the need to pay off a mortgage. As one man put it:

Ultimately it would be good if both parents could spend that same amount of time with the child. But unfortunately, either because of commitments with mortgage [or] what have you, you need to have an income from somewhere.

Another man stressed the importance of developing relationships with the children when they were young. He said it would be very convenient if he and his wife both worked to earn enough to pay off the mortgage and do other things, but that they had 'decided that we want to put more focus on raising the kids at the expense of doing some of those other things'.

All members of this group wanted a substantial role in their children's lives. One participant emphasised the need to develop a trusting relationship; another stressed the significance of communicating with his children and trying to understand where they were coming from. In fact, a number of the men stressed the importance of following the priorities set by the children:

You go with the flow, whatever the kids want to do. If they want to go to basketball, swimming, or whatever, tennis, you fit into their priorities, because that's what you really want to do, you want to be with them.

Clearly, these men saw developing meaningful, quality, child-centred relationships as a significant part of their parental role.

Overall, the participants saw their main responsibilities as fathers in terms of their involvement in direct care responsibilities, such as offering the children guidance and advice, being a role-model, or playing with them. These responsibilities were seen to be in competition with the realities of financial provision, especially paying off the mortgage. While the fathers wanted to spend more time with their kids, they were constrained by the reality of having to earn the family's living. Interestingly though, given that the amount of time spent at work was seen as necessary to provide for the family, none of the participants mentioned breadwinning as their major responsibility. It was relegated to the category of hard social reality over which they had little or no control—something they had to do rather than something they chose to do.
Female partners’ perspectives

The women in the partners’ group described their partners’ main family role as one of back-up and support. As one woman put it, ‘it’s vital to have their support. There is no way I could do this on my own’. This was particularly the case, she said, ‘as the children grow and you need more time and input into everything’. Another woman said that her husband’s support was particularly vital in times of crisis or additional need: ‘When I’m sick, then I need him’.

Another woman described the crucial importance of her husband’s support and involvement in the day-to-day care of the children before and after work, particularly in the case of their oldest child who has a disability. ‘It’s imperative that my husband is there’, she said.

Other women pointed to the importance of their husbands’ support when there were no other family members nearby. ‘We are on our own. So it’s me and him’, said one woman. Another woman who cared full-time for their three young children said:

I think having your husband’s support is very important, especially when you don’t have a lot of family members within [reach]...most of my family are actually interstate.

The partners seemed to accept the reality that support and back-up (rather than an equal sharing) were all that could be expected from their husbands. The men had only limited amounts of time to be with their families because of their working hours. Those women whose husbands did come home earlier, at 4.00 pm or 5.00 pm, stressed that their partners had started work early. In reality, all of the women’s partners were working more hours than they were paid for (see sections 9.4 and 12.7).

The women valued what support their husbands could provide. Sometimes they saw this in terms of child care and as an opportunity to do what they themselves needed to do, such as cook dinner, do housework or have time for herself. One woman said that, if her husband got home early enough from work and ‘it’s not raining’, he would take the boys outside to play. This enabled her to ‘get the tea done’ without interruptions from the children, and gave her ‘a bit of time, peace for myself’. She also pointed out that this had the extra benefit of giving her husband the opportunity of playing sport with the boys, ‘which is what they all love doing anyway’.

Given how limited the men’s time with their children was, the women saw it as being somehow special:

I look at it in terms of quality time, even though my husband is not around very much. He goes without seeing this one [referring to the baby] if she goes to bed early, for 48 hours. It’s more quality than quantity.
Some of these women defined a significant part of their own role as creating the space for their husbands and children to have quality time together in the limited time the men had with the children outside work hours:

One thing I do like to do is...sit down as a family to dinner. Even if he's a bit late, I will let the kids eat a bit late...they're young and so it's a lot of pressure on me...But it's the fact that we all get to sit down and he gets to talk to the kids. And that to me is more important than anything.

Sometimes this extended to protecting the men from some of the more onerous duties of parenthood. The group felt that the old practice of fathers doing the reprimanding when they got home from work ('just wait until your father gets home') placed unfair burdens on fathers, and put further limitations on the potential for them to develop good relationships with their children:

He's had the pressure of work all day. He doesn't want to come home and have to deal with that sort of discipline. Unless there are major sorts of problems and then he obviously has to get involved.

Interestingly, as in the case of the male employees' focus group, none of the partners explicitly identified breadwinning as the main responsibility their partners had to the family.

10.2 Family responsibilities of employees’ partners

**Male employees’ perspectives**

When asked what they saw as their partners’ responsibilities to the family, members of the male employees’ focus group immediately replied that they saw those responsibilities as ‘no different really’ to their own. And yet (as should be clear from the discussion so far), this cannot be the case since the female partners undertook far more of the caring work in the family than their husbands did.

However, from the comments of one of the participants in the group, it became clear that what was meant by ‘no difference’ was no difference in kind. This man argued that, although the parental input of the mother and father changed with age of child, and the mother’s role was more critical in earliest infancy ‘because of breastfeeding and all the rest of the stuff that goes with it’:

over time...when they get between three and six, I reckon it's 50–50, there's no difference to me. We basically try and do things the same in terms of discipline-wise or in terms of teaching them what's right from wrong. Her role is the same as mine. There would be very little difference indeed.
Here, the ‘difference’ being discussed (and dismissed as of no relevance) involves the 
type of interaction each parent has with the child. This participant is saying that both 
mother and father relate to the child in the same way. He does not address the 
question of the amount of time each actually spends in face-to-face interactions.

In fact there were varying degrees of insight amongst the members of the group about 
their partners’ family responsibilities. One man raised the possibility that both parents 
could have equal responsibility although in different roles, for example, one parent as 
‘breadwinner’. As another participant retorted, however, this was not really equality 
since the partner who was at home caring for the kids, generally the female partner, 
was the one who was ‘doing the daily grind’.

One participant said his wife had stayed home to look after their child because she was 
breastfeeding, even though she was earning more than he was at the time. She had 
taken twelve months maternity leave and had since returned to work part-time. He said 
this was the way his wife wanted it, although it could have been the other way round, 
that is, he could have been the one to work part-time.

The men clearly wanted to have equal responsibility for raising children, and they were 
concerned about their own significance in their children’s lives. However, the majority 
had to acknowledge that there was little likelihood of equal participation in the 
foreseeable future.

**The female partners’ perspectives**

All the women in the partners’ focus group were the main caregivers for their children, 
and all saw it as their major responsibility to be there whenever the children needed 
them, taking children to extra-curricula activities, coping with emergencies at school, 
or just ‘to be a guide through their life’, as one woman put it.

The women were keenly aware of the importance of children having parents ‘be there 
for them’. Some gave examples of the bad outcomes for children in families where 
there was not enough care and attention from the parents. One of the participants 
asserted that children needed their parents’ time more than they needed the material 
things that can bought with pay from long work hours. Another contrasted her own 
decision to stay home and care for the children while her husband worked, with the 
parental care they had received when they were children themselves. She saw it in 
terms of ‘this sort of nice, secure environment to grow up in’, and felt they were doing 
a better job of parenting than their own parents had done. She also felt it was the most 
sensible decision ‘because he earns more than I do’.

The group also discussed the pressures of family responsibilities. One woman said (to 
laughter from the rest of the group), ‘Sometimes I feel as though I’m my seven-year-
old’s personal slave!’ Another woman with three preschool-age children said that her 
responsibilities were ‘so much more’ than simply being with the children. ‘The whole 
week you’re just doing stuff’, she said:
Like it might be playgroup, or it might be swimming, and then everything else you need to do as well, and the shopping and stuff like that.

She said there were times when it was not even possible to be with the children ‘because you also have to do the housework’ although, she added (again to laughter from the group), ‘half the time my house doesn’t even look like I’ve touched it’.

Most of the women saw their decisions in terms of personal choice, and some argued that they could perhaps relieve the pressure by ‘easing’ the expectations that they had about themselves. Reality told a different tale. Trying single-handedly to get three young children up, dressed and ready to take the oldest one to school, is not just a matter of expectations. Neither is the lack of support, including the schedules of husbands who have to leave for work early in the morning and who don’t get home till late at night. The women were keen to stress that they were coping and that their husbands were doing the best that they could to support them. But all agreed about the difficulties. As another woman said, ‘You do it because you have to, don’t you?’

10.3 Responsibility for day-to-day child care

The focus groups’ discussions of child care provided a good illustration of the different perceptions of men and women regarding their relative roles in the family. The male employees saw child care primarily in terms of before- and after-school care. They described the strategies used to ensure the children were looked after outside school hours. They referred to their partners’ looking after the children as just one of a number of arrangements, including formal outside-of-school-hours care, other informal care arrangements (particularly grandparents), and older children looking after themselves until their parents got home from work. One participant said that he and his wife consciously made the decision to plan her work hours around school, so that she could pick up the children.

On the whole, they tended to see the choice of child care centring around how happy the child was to go. As one man put it, ‘It follows what your kids want’. Another said his children had got to the point of feeling they were too old for after-school care. Another man said his son had been bullied whilst at care and was currently staying at home with his mother who was on maternity leave. They were worried about sending him back to after-school care when she went back to work.

The men were clearly concerned about child care arrangements. It was equally clear that they were not the main providers of child care, although they were involved in making decisions about it.

In contrast, the women saw child care wholly in terms of their own responsibilities. One woman even went so far as to insist that looking after the children was the
mother's duty. 'I might be old fashioned here', she said, 'but I believe it's the mother's role to look after the children in situations like that because my Mum did'.

For other women in the group, it was not so much a question of duty as of necessity. In answer to the question of what they would do if the after-school care arrangements fell through, such as if their child was unhappy, one of the women immediately replied, 'I'd have to give up work'. Another agreed, 'Yeah, I'd be the same. It would be me rather than him leaving work'. A third woman said she would probably have to give up her paid work too.

Part of that necessity is the unmanageable burden of trying to care for children while working full-time in the paid workforce. One woman said she had returned to work full-time after the birth of her first child and 'physically, it wrecked me'. Another participant said she would rather go without money than have the stress of working full-time as well as caring for children.

These accounts by women throw a different light on the assertions by some male employees that their roles and those of their partners were pretty much the same. While some of the men undertook particular responsibilities, such as taking children to or collecting them from long-day care or looking after the children in the evenings, the female partners in this research carried out by far the major portion of the day-to-day child care. While both male and female partners claimed some involvement in child care as their main familial responsibility, clearly the nature of these parental roles was significantly different. Both male employees and their partners concurred that the role of men was to provide back-up and support for their wives in day-to-day parenting, and to give them a break from child care. All also agreed it was desirable for men to develop good relationships with their children, with the focus on quality rather than quantity of time. At the same time, it was also generally agreed that the female partners were responsible for almost all of the day-to-day care of children and all other household tasks. The support of a partner, like that of other family and friends, could be relied on only in the short-term. Furthermore, any provisions made by the company, such as one-off changes in work times to attend a special event or pick up a child in an emergency, could realistically be of assistance only in the short-term as well.

10.4 Negotiating decisions about work and family

Male employees' perspectives

The male employees’ explanations for their decisions about who in the family was going to care for the children and who would be bringing home the income, tended to waver between economic necessity on the one hand, and women’s supposed suitability for the mothering role on the other.

One man said that, if his wife had had a job paying more than his did, he might have been the one to stay home with the children, at least for a time:
When it came to deciding who would look after the children, I had a much higher income than she did. So it was obvious that I would keep working. But I actually probably wouldn’t have minded staying at home for perhaps a period of time, perhaps not for years and years, but say a year or two or something and she worked. But that wasn’t really an option because women seem to get paid lower than men as probably a general rule out there.

Obviously, this is not a sufficient explanation for women’s giving up paid work to care for children. The wife of at least one participant in this research had been more highly paid than he was, and yet it had been she, not he, who had withdrawn from the workforce on the birth of a child, and who still worked only part-time in order to accommodate child care needs (see section 10.1).

Another participant admitted that he and his wife had been on similar incomes, but that it was she who stayed at home full-time while their children little because she was happy to do it and because, in his view, she did a better job:

> I think in my family it was a lot about who was better suited to the role of looking after the kids, and the other person worked full-time.

One reason given for women’s seemingly greater aptitude for full-time child care involved the fact that it was difficult and frustrating. One male employee openly acknowledged that while he couldn’t do it, his wife apparently could:

> I know that if I was at home full-time with the kids, that would frustrate me a lot more than it does my wife.

Some of the men did give another reason for their lack of interest and involvement in caring for children full-time—the enjoyment and satisfaction they found at work meant they wanted to be there full-time, not at home with the children.

Decisions around which partner would leave work to care for children in emergencies ‘if one of the children got sick’, were negotiated around both partners’ work commitments, how much time each had already taken off, and the policy of their places of work. There was resounding agreement within the group that this is a very difficult situation experienced by many of the participants. A number of the men said it was they who left work to pick up the children, rather than their wives, because it was this company that had the family leave policy. Most of the men indicated they had used leave for this purpose and spoke about it as a positive workplace initiative. However, as mentioned earlier, while men do make use of such provisions for one-off emergencies, they are less likely to be the ones who make the longer-term changes in care arrangements. They are concerned and they do talk it through with their partner. In the long term, however, it is always the woman who makes the necessary changes in her work arrangements, at least in the case of the participants in this study.
Female partners’ perspectives

There was general agreement among the women that decisions about work and family were negotiated together with their husbands:

- It's all done by negotiation.
- That's the only way the family unit works. Otherwise you don’t have a family unit.

A closer look at what actually counted as 'negotiation' in these families indicated some doubt on this point. One participant said that, while decisions were negotiated, this took place on the basis that she and her husband had specific roles—he works and she's there for the kids. Still, these could be negotiated. She gave the example of her partner making adjustments to his work commitments to be available for their adolescent children while she went away for two weeks to study.

Another woman, however, was sceptical because, in her experience, it was more like a battle:

- It's not really negotiation, it's like, “You're going to have to go out and get a job”. “Okay I'll go out and get one at night so that you can be home to be with the kids” (laughter).

Someone else pointed out that this was in fact the kind of thing that counted as negotiation:

- But you do negotiate. In a way that is a negotiation because it's just the way things work. I mean I want to go back and do study myself, but we've talked about it and we were going to wait until this one's [referring to the baby] a bit older.

Here, the second woman tries to get the first to see that what she does not think of as negotiation really is, because some things are inevitable and there is no point in struggling against them. Clearly there is a strong desire here to see their family relationships as negotiated and fair, even at the cost of making a virtue of necessity.

Like the male employees, the women, too, believed it was they, not their husbands, who should make the arrangements necessary to adapt to the demands of child care. One participant put it solely in terms of decisions she had to make:

- You've got to weigh up the pros and cons and work out whether it's best for you to work during the day and miss out on all the things that need to be done during the day, or work at night and be as tired as bloody hell.
This belies the insistence of both groups that decisions about responsibility for child care are negotiated by both partners. While both parties may believe they negotiate, what this participant is saying is that, if she doesn't do what needs to be done, nobody else will. Her responsibility is simply taken-for-granted. In reality, she is the only one doing the weighing up.

10.5 Work and life balance

Balancing work and family: An issue for male employees?

There was an overwhelming consensus within the male employees’ focus group that it was hard to combine work and family, and that the difficulty arose from too much involvement in work. One participant said, ‘You have to make a conscious decision to step back from work at times’. He found this difficult because he tended to become very involved in work. A number of the men discussed the specific issue of trying to combine family with an engineering job in Product Development, pointing out that, as the projects being worked on were always three or four years in the future, ‘they are always there at the back of your mind’.

The first response from the group to the question of what they saw as their major responsibilities towards their families indicates that, for some men, difficulties in balancing work with family life strike at the very core of their role within the family. ‘It’s tough’, this man said:

just trying to be there when [the children] need you, and often you can’t be...they really want to...talk to you, ask you things. So it’s not convenient when you’re not around.

All the men agreed they did not spend as much time as they would like with their families. They emphasised the significance of the time they spent with their children, and some quite openly said they really cherished that time. One employee regretted having worked long hours when his children were small, and hence for ‘having missed those years’. The general consensus from the group was that they were unable to live up to their own expectations of themselves as fathers:

It’s hard to meet expectations when you’re at work all day. I leave at home at five and get home at about six or so. You try to be there as much as you can, but you can’t be.

They also said they felt a high level of pressure at work. This was a major factor in their attempts to balance their work and family lives, and a great cause of stress. The extent to which the men in this case study really did want more family responsibilities and increased involvement in day-to-day child care is certainly a matter for debate. (One participant referred to it as ‘the daily grind’.) Nonetheless, for the majority of these
men developing meaningful relationships with their children was clearly a cherished responsibility.

**Employees as parents: the supervisors’ perspective**

Some supervisors said they regarded employees who were fathers as more committed to the workplace than other employees:

> I think it makes him a better [employee], if anything. He’s a bit more understanding of a lot of things.

At the same time, while being a father might be regarded as an asset in the workplace, employers are reluctant to make any adjustments to accommodate that parenting (Eveline 1999). This same supervisor, who was so approving of employees who are fathers because of their maturity and commitment, ridiculed the use of long-term flexible arrangements, particularly for men with families, throughout the focus group discussion.

There were other supervisors who wanted to keep the issues of work and family completely separate, advocating neutrality on the parental status of employees, rather than discriminating either way. ‘You’re a good employee if you’re a good employee’, said one. This ignores the very point at issue—that work and family need to be balanced because they interact in people’s lives.

The supervisors differed in their expectations of female and male employees who became parents. The more traditional viewed men and women differently. They expected that men would continue as usual, but that women would have a high level of disruption to their work:

> The male has got this fantastic female in the background and she’s looking after them decently and he doesn’t have to worry that much about it...with the woman, she is on the back foot. She is going to have the baby and do everything else along the way. The early years with the woman, we say it’s going to be disruptive.

There were others, though, who argued that there was now an expectation that the workload would be shared and that supervisors would need to take this into account.

### 10.6 What ‘family’ means

The meaning of ‘family’ was not entirely unproblematic among some of the participants in this research. The Union Representative pointed out that, as far as she knew, there had never been any discussion ‘about what work and family means’, and that it was difficult to see how it could be addressed.
Some of the members of the supervisors’ group felt that the family responsibilities of employees were often much broader than ‘just care for kids’. The Union Representative gave the example of the family needs of employees who were grandparents as one potential area the company could address using a broader definition of family. This could dovetail with the interest expressed by some managers in promoting staged part-time retirement for older workers.

While proposals like these might seem at first sight to promise policies better tailored to employees’ actual needs, they would do little to help with balancing work and family life with dependent children, as the WorkLife initiative (discussed in the next section) demonstrated.

10.7 Male employees’ participation in the WorkLife Taskforce

According to one of the HR Managers, the motivation behind the WorkLife Taskforce was to enable employees to participate in defining what work and life meant to them, and to develop relevant WorkLife strategies based on those definitions. He added that consultation across the board is the company’s ‘usual way of doing things’:

> Our approach is very much one of involvement, and so when we're trying to do anything new or different, our natural thought is…to get input from various parts of the business to understand what this issue is all about…and develop some solutions that are addressing those issues (HR Manager Two).

Certainly this was evident in the operation of the WorkLife Taskforce that was facilitated by HR but on the whole carried out by the employees themselves. Initiatives of the taskforce have included ‘WorkLife week’, a work and life newsletter, and an extension in the opening hours of the on-site gym so that employees on afternoon shift can have access.

When asked whether the taskforce had focused on fathers, the HR Manager responsible observed that they hadn’t ‘really focused so much on the family stuff’, largely because these concerns were seen to be addressed already through leave provisions (HR Manager Three).

The male employees who participated in this research weren’t involved in the WorkLife Taskforce. As discussed earlier (section 8.2.2), however, they did comment that many of the WorkLife initiatives did not address their needs because the general ‘life’ focus did not recognise their responsibilities as parents. Hence, although there was a significant involvement of male employees in the WorkLife Taskforce, by omitting the family concerns of male employees, it reinforced rather than challenged the view that ‘family’ is not a major factor in men’s life and work balance concerns.
11 Take-up of provisions by men

11.1 Formal family-friendly policies

The findings indicate that men’s take-up of the formal provisions at the company is minimal. They are used mainly by women, and largely in connection with maternity leave. One HR manager said he knew of ‘one or two male employees that took up part-time work some time ago when the policies were relatively new’, but that ‘the numbers would have been very low and stayed very low’ (HR Manager Two).

Another HR manager commented that she and her opposite number at site B could think of only a handful of men who had used the provisions, out of a combined workforce of approximately 5000 employees:

Four men in the past year, and none of those arrangements as far as we know (I think one may be long-term) is still in place…I think we’ve got…at any given time…in total maybe thirty people across [the company]…The men would be…five per cent or something of the total, and certainly much shorter term, whereas…women that come in…are looking for long-term part-time work (HR Manager Three).

A number of HR managers noted that, even when men did use formal flexible arrangements, it might not be for family reasons. One of the four men mentioned above, for example, had used the provisions for a sporting commitment. In the HR Managers’ experience, men’s use of the provisions was usually short-term. It was the women who were more interested in long-term, part-time positions that would enable them to meet their family responsibilities.

The women in the partners’ focus group agreed that their husbands had not really used any of the provisions, apart from taking off the odd day here and there. One woman said her husband had used time-in-lieu to leave work early on occasion. She believed it was ‘normally okay’ for him to do this, given the long hours he usually worked. Apart from one man who had taken a few days bereavement leave, and one who was given the day off to move house, the participants only discussed the men ‘moving hours around’.

There were two examples from the male employees’ group of more permanent arrangements men had made with the company. One man gave the example of an agreement he had with management to work from another site one day a week in order to be closer to home. Another said he had an agreement with his manager to vary his working hours to do more at the beginning of the week and less later, so that he could pick his child up from care.
11.2 Informal flexibility for ‘one-offs’

Rather than using the company's formal policies on part-time work, job-sharing or telecommuting, the men are much more likely to use informal forms of flexibility to meet family commitments, such as leaving work early to attend a special school event, or taking a day's annual leave during the school holidays.

When one of the HR Managers was asked how successful she thought the family-friendly policies at the company had been among men, she agreed that men's take-up of the formal part-time provisions had been extremely low. She went on to suggest that men might be making more use of informal provisions, but that this might be going unrecognised. ‘If you look informally’, she said, ‘I think [that] probably happens on a much greater scale than we actually see’ (HR Manager One).

There was some evidence for this ‘hidden’ use of informal flexibility from the male employees’ focus group. Some of the men said that, if they had not seen their children for a while because they had had to spend too much time at work, they tried to take a day out of their annual leave. It would be almost impossible for this kind of usage to be identified as a family-friendly practice, since it involves provisions devised for other purposes. But what is significant here is that the company's flexibility regarding how employees use leave, including in single days, not only makes these standard provisions more family-friendly, it also means they are in a form readily accessible by the men. As another HR manager said, the men are unlikely to think in terms of part-time work, but they would be aware of ‘one-off type stuff’ and that they had permission to go, for example, ‘to school parent-teacher days, to kids’ performances, to take partners’ and kids' birthdays off, etc.’ (HR Manager Three).

Both employees and their partners understood informal flexibility to be standard practice at the company, and recognised that it was often used by men to meet family needs. This was understood to be informal flexibility as required, the justification being that as you had put in long hours, it was okay to ‘knock off’ a bit early sometimes. The women appreciated these informal arrangements, but they also wanted it recognised that their husbands more than made up any time by the long hours they normally worked.

They saw the company as quite flexible in renegotiating standard provisions for one-off family needs as they arose. For example, in response to the ‘presentation day’ scenario one woman said:

If he had the time, he'd just work it out to nick out for half an hour or an hour and then come back, stay a bit later or start a bit earlier.

Two other women described how their husbands had taken some time out of their work-day for their child's first day of school and day care respectively. Similarly, all the male participants said that they would go to their child's prize-giving and arrange to make the time up.
Another response to the presentation day scenario from the partners’ group was less certain. ‘He’ll weigh up the importance of what he’s got on at work’, one woman said. She also said she did not see attending a presentation day as a really significant event, unlike the first day at school. (Her children were not yet at school.) Another participant with three school-age children assured her it would be important.

What this vignette illustrates is the belief on the part of at least some of the women that the reasons for men taking time off work must be important, and not just ordinary family things. There was some indication from this group that what they did as mothers was ‘ordinary’, but that what their partners did as fathers was ‘extraordinary’.

While a school event might be important enough for her to go to, he wouldn’t be expected to go unless it was some milestone event. Clearly, the women were concerned that informal flexibility was used with care.

This is reinforced by the women’s responses when asked whether their husbands would consider making long-term arrangements to help with child care (given that the men had willingly made short-term arrangements). Their overriding concern was whether or not the workplace would cope:

- It would be too hard on the company because of the position that they have, or my husband has.
- I think it’s also asking too much of the company. You can expect it for a short period of time, the flexibility, but long-term you’ve got to also think of reality as well. I mean, can the company operate?

Another woman concurred, commenting that ‘this is why you decide that one of you is going to stay home in the first place’. There was indeed general agreement in the group that, while they wanted their partners to have flexibility in the short-term to meet emergencies and one-offs, longer term flexible arrangements were not to be expected, as it was the role of the women themselves to provide the major part of the care for children within their families.

### 11.3 Policies for men?

While clearly the company does provide family-friendly provisions, there is still the question of whether or not those provisions are relevant to men, given what would appear to be men’s reluctance to avail themselves of them. It is true that the concerns leading to the development of the policies at this company were specifically related to women (see section 8.1). As the HR Manager cited there put it:

> We’re having great difficulty attracting women into the engineering sorts of areas simply because the pool’s…not that big. So we need to really look at what else we could do there...we’ve had one of our senior female
engineers actually have three babies and work part-time and come back and all that sort of thing as well too. So I think attracting and retaining women in the organisation is a key driver (HR Manager One).

It was generally agreed that there was nothing in the policies themselves that discriminated between the sexes (with the obvious exception of maternity and paternity leave). However, this does not necessarily mean that the men have as much access to the provisions as the women do. Whilst the policies themselves do not discriminate on the basis of sex, the fact that they were intended to address concerns the company had about women means their availability tends to favour women. There are also many other factors impinging on men’s take-up that inhibit men’s access in reality, including high workloads and their families’ reliance on the income they make from full-time work. The next section explores these barriers in more detail.
12 Barriers to men's take-up of family-friendly initiatives

12.1 Only for women?

A vice-president found himself at a loss to explain men's lack of use of family-friendly provisions. He suggested a number of plausible reasons, among them the possibility that men tended to believe the provisions were only for women:

I don't really know... how much of it is they [men] do want to use these policies but they feel constrained because they feel like the company views this [as only] for women... even though they say it's not; [whether it's because] the sub-culture views it as really for women; or [whether] they'd like to use them but they can't (HR Manager Four).

While the supervisors said they did not treat men any differently from the way they treated women, they were nevertheless inclined to see the provisions as primarily directed towards women. As a consequence, they did tend to react differently according to whether the employee wanting some flexible arrangement was a man or a woman. When a woman needed such arrangements, they said, it was usually because she was having a child. Hence, they felt they had no room to manoeuvre because 'usually when they tell you it's too late' and 'you have to react to it'. With male employees, in contrast, they felt they had more options for negotiation, and hence the company might not need to be as flexible for men. Sometimes they even spoke as though they believed the differential treatment was justified by biology. This lack of sympathy for fathers' needs placed obvious limits on the actual availability of flexibility for male employees.

12.2 Lack of information

An elementary obstacle to men's use of this company's family-friendly provisions might be that they are simply not aware of them. The responsible executives, especially the immediate supervisors, and the employees themselves, all identify lack of knowledge as a key issue.

Management responsible for developing and implementing policy were dubious about their success in disseminating information about the provisions. As one HR manager said:

I would imagine most men would barely be aware that they're there or what they mean... if you're not a HR person you would be maybe vaguely aware that [the company] offers some sort of flexibility and that would be it (HR Manager Three).
The supervisors said they felt they did not have an adequate working knowledge of the policies and entitlements. As one participant put it:

There’s no real, clear understanding at our level as to what it is that the company’s offering; what it is that we can do legitimately; what it is that we can go [with] to the person that is reporting to us...I don’t think we are encouraged to act that way, and I guess we haven’t taken the initiative either (Supervisors’ focus group).

And yet these are the staff who are ‘at the coal-face’, at the most crucial point of implementation for employees who might want to make use of the provisions. One participant in the supervisors’ focus group gave the example of a male employee asking if he was entitled to the six weeks maternity leave. In the following discussion there was a lot of uncertainty about what was provided for men (i.e. paternity leave), such as its length, whether it was paid or unpaid.

The male employees also confessed to a lack of awareness of the company’s family-friendly provisions. One man said the provisions ‘must be on the company website somewhere’, while another claimed he had actually looked them up there.

In a discussion on how they became aware of policies, the men indicated this had been primarily through taking the initiative themselves. One man simply went to his supervisor, told him what he wanted to do and asked whether it was possible. Another found out by going ahead and doing what he wanted to do. ‘That’s how I find things out,’ he said, ‘I just do it and then find out the consequences after’. He also said he had refused to stay back late on a number of occasions, pointing out he had already worked the required eight hours and he had a family to go to. He found that was accepted. Still, employees remained uncertain about what it was reasonable to request.

The male employees’ partners also seemed to have only a hazy knowledge of company initiatives. Among those mentioned in the company’s application for the Work and Family Awards was a ‘parenting page’ intended to be sent out to all employees. The women were asked if any of them had seen it. Only one thought she had, but then couldn’t remember what was in it. This question prompted another woman to say that such a big company ought to have a newsletter. There was much laughter in the group when another participant said, ‘They do’.

But although the company needs to make its policies public and seek out means to disseminate the information, the intended recipients need to be paying attention. The successful transmission of a message depends as much on the appropriate response from the receiver as it does on the action of the sender.

The company has used publications such as its WorkLife newsletter, intranet facilities and email broadcasts to bring attention to its policies, but too often male employees do not pay enough attention because they do not feel that the message applies to
them. They simply don’t see them as relevant, according to one HR manager (HR Manager Three).

12.3 Difficulties with implementation

Another obstacle to employees taking-up the company's policies can be found in the difficulties with implementing them. Whether antiquated systems, rigid attitudes or ways in which the workplace was structured, these difficulties meant that sometimes the flexibility required to support the policies was not really in place. As one HR manager pointed out:

The policies, I think, serve employees well. [But] the systems that we have to back it up need looking at, in that our payroll systems and all those sorts of things make it more difficult (HR Manager One).

One employee described the difficulty he had trying to get permission to use the company access code on his own computer at home. He felt this would really help him with his family commitments by enabling him to work from home at times when his children were sick.

It would seem that difficulties like this are partly a consequence of the policies not being given a very high priority because they were seen as relevant only to a few people. The HR Manager quoted above said that it was a common attitude towards part-time work that, because it affected only a small number of people, few resources were devoted to it. She gave the example of the pay-roll systems that currently operate on 'manual processes'. This effectively meant, she said, that employees had to keep track of their own hours ‘to make sure that what they get paid at the end matches up’ (HR Manager One).

Another difficulty concerns the different working environments in the company (section 7.2), especially the differing conditions entailed by the salaried/hourly-paid distinction. The highest rate of take-up of family-friendly provisions was to be found in the HR Division itself, with some employees in Product Development also working part-time and job-sharing. But the production line remains largely outside the reach of the provisions. Management are aware of this and the need to do something about it. As the same HR Manager said:

We find pockets of the organisation…manufacturing, for instance, [that] will say it’s just too hard to do, whereas I think if we tried harder we could probably do it (HR Manager One).

Another important stumbling block was referred to by a vice-president as ‘the culture of the organisation':
I think the policies themselves in a vacuum are successful because I think they’re what we need. [But] there [are] two components: there’s the policy and then there’s the culture of the organisation that affects how willing people are to use the policy (HR Manager Four).

He did not say what that culture was (see section 12.4 for some discussion of this), except to say that it was not very supportive of men’s use of the provisions.

The Union Representative raised the issue of having to take family leave out of the personal sick leave entitlements. ‘If the guy takes the time off to look after the kids’, she said, ‘then that just reduces his option for taking sick leave’. This was particularly a problem for employees in the production area, she felt, given recent staff cuts, since ‘there’s a greater risk of injury now, especially repetitive injuries’.

The representative implied that there was a big difference between company policy objectives and implementation:

There’s policies and processes on one hand, [and] there’s the day-to-day response on the other. (I don’t know how to get the words for that). So you’ve got, “This is the framework and that’s how you’re supposed to behave”, and then you’ve got the actual…out there on the shop floor-types of things that really happen.

12.4 Culture

As one of the most persistent barriers to men’s take-up of family-friendly provisions, culture should perhaps more accurately be seen as a series of barriers, since it comes in a number of guises. There are the roles each sex is expected to play in a traditional family dynamic that has by no means lost its influence, despite the changes that have occurred. There are the expectations placed on both men and women, different for each sex, but equally demanding. While it might be less difficult for men to forswear the breadwinner role than for mothers to abandon the child-caring one, the pressures are still real and intransigent. But the sex roles are not left outside the factory gate.

It is true that, as a vice-president said, ‘that’s not so much a corporate culture as a societal culture’ (HR Manager Four). However, it is also a corporate culture, as the participants in this research made abundantly clear (see section 12.4).

Sex roles

While informants in this company had less to say about sex roles than informants at company number two, they did have something to say. One of them put it in terms of the expectations on women:

In society, people typically expect women to be the primary care-giver. After taking maternity leave, it’s a much more common expectation that
women work part-time, although logically there’s no reason for that. It’s just...an expectation. To a large extent that’s reflected in what we see here (HR Manager Two).

A HR manager put it in terms of pressures on men:

I think for some men...there is external pressure in...society. While there are role-models out there of [the] primary caretaker being the dad, I think a lot of men just aren’t comfortable with that...I would imagine that they get it from the...very real economic imperative that...if they are working at [the company], there’s a good chance that they will be earning more than their partner, right through to that “Well, you know what happens when I go to a barbie” (HR Manager Three).

A supervisor placed the issue in the context of social change, especially on the part of women, and what he saw as men’s resistance to change:

The guy is brought up in the community...to go out and get a job and work, whereas the female has been brought up in a community of "Well, you only need to work until you get married, or get pregnant or whatever". Those are the early days...Now, today you've the difference in so far as the women are making careers of what they want to do and so they're now looking at working and so if they can get out in the workforce and it suits them or get out and do casual or whatever they seem to do it. But the guy doesn’t seem to want to do that. The guy wants to get out there and make a career and job and get on with it (Supervisors’ focus group).

A vice-president felt that the culture was not supportive of men’s take-up of family-friendly provisions, but that those attitudes were not peculiar to this company and did not originate here:

There are a lot of men with young children, and particularly those with working partners...Why is it the woman's always staying home or working part-time, and not the man? So my guess is that there is a feeling that the culture's not all that supportive of it...[and] my view is that that's not so much a corporate culture as a societal culture (HR Manager Four).

**Workplace culture**

But it is also a corporate culture. As the Union Representative argued, normative familial role allocations were not only evident in societal patterns more generally. The manufacturing environment was heavily reliant on them because it was ‘tied to the oldest form of labour management, which is set on the assumption that the guy has at home a wife to look after the kids’.
She said that site B in particular was very conservative and very much structured by the expectation that ‘the man’s the breadwinner’. It was the same in the company as a whole:

> It’s a manufacturing environment. In the production area, there’s only 10 percent of your workforce is women, and that hasn’t substantially changed in 20 years. So it’s still probably one of the few last bastions of the man as breadwinner-type culture that permeates it. So within that context I wouldn’t expect guys to think about their options for taking up family-friendly provisions, and I wouldn’t necessarily assume they had the financial flexibility either.

Summarising the workplace barriers to men’s use of family-friendly provisions, she said:

> The barriers are financial, the barriers are production requirements, the barriers are low labour levels or tight extreme labour levels, another barrier is just-in-time. So it’s the way work’s organised.

Nonetheless, things were being done to challenge these barriers. She said it was not ‘an easy process’ and had not ‘been done across the industry at all’ as yet. But, as she also pointed out, they were only at the beginning of trying to do something about it.

This view of the company as still very much a traditional male culture because it was a manufacturing industry was supported by the sex ratio among the staff. Woman comprised only 14 per cent of employees, and only nine per cent in manufacturing. That still set the tone, even though the company was very open and receptive to woman in all areas, including high-level supervision (two vice-presidents were women, for instance). The company also made attempts to recruit men and women in equal numbers although, as one HR manager commented, ‘engineering is the area that lets us down’. Because they cannot get female engineering graduates, the company has instituted a ‘women in engineering scholarship program’ (HR Manager Three).

This HR manager had more to say about the culture peculiar to the manufacturing industry. ‘This line that builds [the product] drives us’, she said. She went on to say that this kind of attitude, the view ‘that you’ve got to keep churning it out without stopping and thinking about the way’ it is done, permeated ‘every aspect of the business, be it finance or engineering or design’.

She also thought it was part of a manufacturing industry environment to emphasise a perfect work attendance record and even reward people for it. She felt it was something they ought not to be doing because it was as though the company were saying ‘We’ll reward you if you come to work, even though your life may be falling apart’. However, she did not see how the company could do away with it because it was ‘such a looked forward to treat’ and there wasn’t anything to replace it with.
Some of the male employees also voiced a concern that rewarding perfect attendance undermined the notion of family-friendliness by penalising those who took advantage of the opportunities. One man gave a recent example of one such incident:

An incident just irked me a little bit recently, when they came around and they gave everybody a bag if they hadn’t had any time off. I thought, "I don’t remember having any time off", and then I tracked back and I had taken a family day off. I wasn’t sick, the guy next to me wasn’t sick either and he got the bag.

The men said the tracking of absenteeism did not record the reasons why employees were absent, and hence could not show whether leave was being used to care for family. They wanted leave to be recorded in particular categories in order to identify family leave. They were also concerned that the reward system supported workers turning up sick to work.

The HR Manager quoted above said she also thought this culture was a generational thing and that it was changing as more and more younger people joined the company:

I think it’s probably difficult for older men, and older men who are in supervisory positions, because it’s just something they’ve not gone through. I certainly hear...the younger men reflect the same values as younger women...and I think they will make much better managers as they develop responsibility, because it’s part of how they see their lives (HR Manager Three).

Something of the traditional workplace culture was expressed in the supervisors’ focus group, where some people voiced hostility towards increasing workplace flexibility, particularly men’s use of it. One supervisor said that, in the ‘early days’, there was only ‘one person disrupting work load’ (presumably the woman), but that, ‘Now, you’ve got two’ (presumably the husband as well as the wife). He went on to ask:

Is that doing good for production? Is it doing good for companies? Is it doing good for Australia? That now we have twice as many disruptions to manufacturing and work (Supervisors’ focus group).

Another man objected to the idea of varying start and finish times:

These guys that you’re talking about as having the early times...are any of them in a responsible job that they are the only one to do it? In other words, if I came along at 3.30 and I needed to know some information, how do I get the information if that particular guy is the only one with it and he’s gone home?
However, these were minority viewpoints and more progressive views were expressed just as strongly. One of the other supervisors responded to this statement in terms of the social responsibilities of corporations. Just as sick leave was now accepted as a corporate responsibility, he said, ‘shouldn’t the company also make provisions when employees have children?’

This division clearly illustrates the point that supervisory discretion can be either a barrier or an enabling factor, and the role of immediate supervisors was crucial in implementing family-friendly provisions.

**Change**

Like the union representative quoted above, many other informants also thought things were changing. A HR manager saw the change as slow but inexorable:

> It’s just like any cultural change, it’s a slow process. It doesn’t happen overnight. We’ve been working on it for some years now, and I’m sure we’ll be working on it for a few more years before we get to where we really want to be (HR Manager Two).

He saw it in terms of the changed attitudes of senior management:

> I think in the past that [fathers’ uptake] would have been a real issue because senior management would have said this person lacks commitment. But I think now that’s changed (HR Manager Two).

Another HR manager felt the change had been ‘very much a directed approach’, largely the result of workforce pressures on company management rather than internally motivated:

> I think…a lot of it’s because of changing expectations [on the part] of the workforce. That’s probably driven a lot of it. It wouldn’t probably have been something that [the company] just intrinsically did because they thought it was a good thing to do…because it still is very much a fairly structured organisation, fairly entrenched culture (HR Manager One).

One member of the supervisors’ focus group saw the generational change rather differently from the union representative. He saw it in terms of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ attitudes, the latter identified with ‘the young ones’, while he himself identified with the former:

> The question is, which way will it change though? Will the young ones become hard arses like us later on? Or are we going to mellow and become marshmallows like you? I’m watching the culture myself and I think it’s definitely there. The young ones, to us they’re soft puppies, they can’t cope.
A HR manager felt that things were changing, but that could cause problems by conveying inconsistent messages to staff about where their commitments should lie:

When you're in that sort of transition phase from...“That's how it was” to “This is how we want to be”, we sometimes probably send some inconsistent messages to people. [That] probably helps to reinforce that internal feeling that “If I do that flexible stuff, then I’ll be thought to be lacking commitment or whatever” (HR Manager Two).

Role models

Some informants discussed the important part role models played in engendering cultural change in the workplace, e.g. plant managers leaving work at reasonable hours in order to take time out to be with their kids. Role models could be enabling if successful men were seen to be balancing work and family by using the provisions. Participants in the supervisors’ focus group commented that what leaders and managers do ‘all cascades down’. So if more senior people publicly worked shorter, more flexible hours, and people were more accepting of that, the culture would shift.

At the same time, there was also recognition that, not only did role models tend to be fairly thin on the ground, there were still strong cultural pressures not to emulate them. One of the interviewees from HR said:

I think there is an element of inhibition, whether it’s males or females, [about] people are taking off. There’s a strong sort of work ethic and long hours culture at [the company]...to be honest, and certainly a culture that says you have to work hard and it's an expectation, and most people I think don’t feel bad about that...They feel that’s what they should be doing, they're personally driven to do that (HR Manager Two).

As one HR manager put it:

What managers and supervisors...continually communicate [is] that they’re saying, “Do as I say, not as I do. You know I need to be here until seven, but I don’t want you to be here”. For ambitious people [the normal reaction is], “Well, hang on, I want your job one day” (HR Manager Three).

12.5 Men’s earning capacity

Despite the fact that none of the male employees gave earning an income as their primary role in the family (section 10.1), everyone emphasised strongly that these men were the main breadwinners in their families and that, therefore, doing anything that reduced their incomes was simply not an option. When the partners’ focus group was
asked whether or not their husbands would be willing to look at options other than full-time work, the clear response from the group was ‘no’:

I would have to say “no” to that one…He’d be the primary breadwinner…[With] what I did, I wouldn’t earn as much as him.

The women were in complete agreement that having their husbands work fewer hours while being paid less was not currently a possibility. However, they would like their husbands to be able to work fewer hours with no reduction in pay, by doing less unpaid overtime.

Telecommuting was seen to have little to offer. Most of the women considered the idea of their partners being at home caring for their young children and working at the same time, even for one day a week, an absurd notion.

The Union Representative discussed men’s role as the main income providers for their families in relation to job-sharing:

In terms of guys taking it up I think we’ll run into the same thing of financial questions, especially if it’s families relying on income. And the thing is that your production workers tend to earn less than your salaried staff, so that financial question becomes a bigger [one]. They don’t have so much put away. They don’t have the financial flexibility.

A participant in the male employees’ focus group summed up the dominant feeling of the group:

When it came to deciding who would look after the children, I had a much higher income than she did. So it was obvious that I would keep working…I wouldn’t have minded staying at home for perhaps a period of time…But that wasn’t really an option because women seem to get paid lower than men as a general rule out there.

Similarly, participants in the supervisors’ group felt that more men would stay home with the children if their wives could earn more than they did:

I think a lot more men would take that option up if their partner was earning more money than what they were.

If my wife earned more than what I was earning, then I would absolutely love to stay home with the kids because I feel there are things I am missing out on.

One man even went so far as to say that the issue of who stayed at home looking after the children was not usually ‘a male-/female thing’, but a question of ‘who’s earning the most money’.
Not everybody was so sure. One male employee suggested it might be just a question of attitudes and habit:

I guess there’s no logical reason why the guys aren’t job-sharing. Maybe it’s just a mindset that guys think that even if we suggest it, it will get knocked back [by management].

Given what had actually happened in the case of one couple where the wife had indeed earned more than her husband, it would seem that the issue is more complicated than a simple calculus of comparative wage rates. The husband in this couple said that although his earnings capacity was lower than that of his wife, he was the one who had continued to work full-time because his partner wanted the opportunity to develop a close connection with their child while it was young, and especially while she was breastfeeding. In the case of another couple, the husband said that, while he and his partner had the ability to earn a similar income, his partner was happier to stay at home full-time while the kids were little. He also thought she did a better job of caring for the kids:

I think in my family it was a lot about who was better suited to the role of looking after the kids, and the other person worked full-time.

Hence, men’s higher earning capacity cannot be the only reason for their reluctance to consider working arrangements giving priority to family responsibilities over involvement in paid work. The other reasons given—breastfeeding, the mothers’ need to take the lead in raising children and their desire to be with their new babies—are very real in people’s lives, and perfectly understandable as reasons for people acting in one way rather than another. But they also replicate those traditional sex roles which are such a barrier to men’s uptake of family-friendly policies.

12.6 Career

To the extent that levels of income depend on career progression, the question of whether or not men’s take-up of family-friendly options is likely to have a negative impact on their careers is related to the question of men’s earning capacity. It is also different, however. Income has an elemental, survival aspect to it—families with insufficient income are unable to provide themselves with the resources to live in comfort and dignity. This is a very real threat hanging over people’s heads in these times of sudden staff cutbacks, ‘downsizing’, ‘lean, mean’ organisations, ‘efficiency’, and business failures that too often take their former employees’ entitlements with them. ‘Career’, though, is not just about income, but also about self-esteem and prestige and, as one HR manager pointed out in relation to paternity leave, about ambition.
Another HR manager believed that ‘career stalling’ was an important factor in men’s failure to take up the company’s family-friendly provisions: ‘They would think, “Well, that’s the end of my career if I do something like that”’. It was possible that men perceived provisions such as part-time work as make-work invented to get people back to work. She said the company had done that in the past, but they now did their best to ensure that flexible options involved ‘bona fide, designated-type positions’ (HR Manager One).

Another HR manager commented that working part-time had less of an effect on women’s careers, but that it was still an issue for men:

“We’ve got a lot of good women particularly in the part-time positions, but if you had men in those positions they would probably be pushing the boundaries. So there is still a perception that it may impact on your career” (HR Manager Three).

In the supervisors’ focus group, two of the participants were adamant that men who used flexible work arrangements jeopardised their promotion prospects. One said, ‘From where I’m sitting now, the red pen would be out’, while the other added, ‘not up to the calibre’. However, another said that work hours were never discussed by the Personal Development Committee (of which he was a member) when they were considering applications for promotion. The issue was rather ‘their ability to do the job’. There was some argument in the group about whether this was actually the reality experienced by those applying for promotion.

Another supervisor asked whether the reason for taking time off work made a difference:

“If a male came and asked for three months off to go to Europe travelling, would you think that people would treat that differently if they asked for three months off to look after a child?”

To start with, the following discussion implicitly assumed that a young person’s wanting to go travelling was ‘reasonable’, but time off for child care was different, although no supervisor actually said so outright. Eventually, however, one participant clearly stated that he did not understand why there should be a difference from a supervisor’s point of view. Finally, another participant said he doubted people missed out on promotion because they took advantage of flexible working arrangements, and that it was not the case in the Product Development area.

Participants in the employees’ focus group certainly believed they had to choose between climbing the career ladder and being committed to their families. When asked how being a parent affected their careers, some of the participants said they thought they were less likely to get promotions that involved moving interstate or internationally, and that the company would give preference to someone with no
children. Others thought that parenthood could affect how their work performance was assessed because of the time needed to be away from work for family commitments, ‘particularly if you're compared to a single person who is putting in a lot of extra hours’. Others felt that being a parent might actually help because having a family meant an employee was more likely to be committed to work and to seem ‘stable’. On balance, though, being put up for promotion was seen to be less likely for those with a family.

Some men expressed the view that managers with families had a better perspective on the needs of employees with families. One participant was not so sure about that. It was his view that those who went into management got ‘married to the job’, particularly in years gone by, and that, because they had forsaken their family responsibilities, they expected employees seeking promotion to do the same.

For some of the men, the question of promotion had become irrelevant. One man said his attitude to work (and life generally) had changed when he became a father. Another said he had made a conscious decision not to strive for a high level promotion because it would mean being unable to have the right balance between work and family. A number of others agreed they too had had to choose between promotion (and therefore increased hours) and family. As one man put it:

> Your aspirations go...I don’t want to get into management, I don’t want [the] extra hours, I don’t want all that “getting the blood out of a stone” scenario. You’re constantly pushed: “Oh well, you know we want you to go up higher, [so] you’ll need to work a bit higher and do this”. But I don’t. I'm comfortable with what I'm doing.

Another man said:

> You’ve got to try and put on a brave face when you’re at work to let them think it’s number one. But always in the back of your mind the kids are number one.

From the employer’s perspective, comments like these may seem to reinforce fears that the priority of work diminishes in men's minds with increasing commitment to their families, and that wanting to change work hours is evidence of decreasing commitment to the workplace. But the company’s own work-life balance initiatives are intended to be a strong message that work is not the whole of life.

### 12.7 Workload

The male employees identified heavy workload as a key barrier to taking up family-friendly provisions. They argued that there was simply too much work to do in the official standard working day:
The problem is you can’t do your job between eight and 4.30. You need more hours in the day to do it and if you don’t put the hours in you just fall more and more into the shit and no one’s going to do it for you.

When asked what the company could do differently in order to make balancing work and family life easier, reducing long hours and workload dominated the discussion in the male employees’ group. They felt there was no let up in work pressure. They started each day with a big workload and when they did ‘bust their chops’ to get it done by doing the long hours, the next deadline was made even more strenuous, as though the company were saying, ‘Well, you got it done last time’. The men saw the only other alternative to long hours currently being worked was to ‘do it in the time you’ve got’ (that is, to work only during the hours they are paid for). But that would mean not doing a good job, they said, and hence not feeling good about your work, not to mention the added worry about your performance appraisal.

Participants in the partners’ focus group confirmed their husbands’ perceptions about the workload. Their partners’ hours of work varied, from leaving at 7.30 am and getting home at 4.00 pm, to leaving at 6.45 am and getting home at 6.45 pm. Generally, they were gone for about 11 hours. One woman, who said that her partner already worked 12 hours a day, commented in relation to telecommuting: ‘What! And do more work from home as well?’ She also said her partner regularly checked work email at home. Another participant said her husband did too, even when he was on holiday. However, even they accepted that 12 hours a day plus checking emails at home might be necessary to do the job.

The Union Representative saw the problem of workload as particularly acute at site B because of the higher levels of job insecurity in the suburb where it was located:

[Site B] is a workplace culture where you’re pretty much scared of losing your job because everyone else in [that suburb] has, apart from [the company]. [The company] is the biggest employer in [the suburb], so [if] you’re working at [the company] you’re one of the few people in [the suburb] with work, and with good solid work. So the attitude seems to be that you take as much as you can get while you’re getting it, not that people feel insecure at [the company], but [that site B] feels insecure. So if you get offered 50 hours a week or 60 hours a week, you’ll take that because it’s keeping [site B and the suburb] alive.

But the workload is a concern to employees across both sites and in professional positions too, as comments from the supervisors’ focus group indicated. The question of what the workplace could do to make combining work and family easier, led to the following exchange:

For me, it is get rid of the long hours work culture.
But then you have to change too many policies.

There is no policy that says you have to work long hours. It’s got nothing to do with policy. It’s the long hours work culture. Look in that car park there at six o’clock tonight and see how many cars are there.

So you’re saying that the announcement we had from [the company] about 5000 people being put off isn’t the reason why you’re working back.

There were two ways in which the pressure of work was increased. One was by giving people too many objectives to meet. Currently when objectives are changed, the new ones are added on top of already existing ones without consideration of the work the team is already doing. As a HR manager pointed out:

> We do set objectives for people, but then we will load additional objectives on without maybe readjusting the first set of objectives…so the reality is the workload can build without necessarily readjusting priorities (HR Manager Two).

The other way is to keep re-adjusting production norms upwards. The male employee quoted above, who said people put in extra hours to get the work done, then went on to say that:

> The company then sees [the work] being done and then says we can survive with less people, with less resources.

The women in the partners’ group described some the processes of cost-cutting and downsizing responsible for the heavy workload:

> There used to be two or three of them. There is now one person for that eight-hour shift and one person for this shift. So there it is. I don’t think they can have flexi-time.

Another woman was worried that her husband was working alone, particularly on the weekends, although for safety reasons he is legally not supposed to be on his own. ‘They’ve cut his area down to just basically skeleton staff’, she said.

**Unpaid overtime**

Not only are staff working long hours, those hours are frequently unpaid (although this research did not uncover how frequently). The men in the employees’ group said that the practice of claiming time-in-lieu was frowned upon. ‘Years ago if you had to stay back…you actually claimed it’, one man said. Another said, ‘They don’t want you to have [paid] overtime now, but they [still] want the work done.’ Another man said that some employees in his section had volunteered their time on whole shifts, that is,
worked for no pay, just to get the work done. Some participants said they recorded their actual start and finish times, even though they were not paid for the overtime, so that it was at least on record.

The Union Representative argued that, because of the clear expectation that staff ‘work a lot of unpaid overtime’, any flexible work arrangements provided by the company were ‘almost a payback, not a generosity’.

Not all the overtime was unpaid. But even when it was paid, there was an element of coercion. Another participant said that he’d rather be at home with his family than getting money on overtime because most of it went in tax anyway.

**Understaffing**

There is agreement certainly about the long hours. But participants made the point that the hours are not just a matter of culture, but a real necessity in order to get the work done on limited resources (HR Manager Two). There were just not enough employees to cover the workload (Male employees’ focus group).

The Union Representative gave examples of how understaffing undermined flexibility by adding to the workloads:

> If somebody takes two hours less a day working because they take their kids to school, all the other workers in that area have to pick up the slack. And you’re getting to the point where it’s so tight, there’s so little slack that you’re really asking the impossible, or unfairness to other workers. [It’s not like] there’s an extra three or four workers in an area so…nobody’s going to care. It really is like there is just no extra time.

> The reduction in labour levels has made it even more difficult…You’re meant to have a relief worker. The group leader wasn’t supposed to be working on the line. They were there to make sure [of] things, [that] stuff was coming in and out [and] everything was okay. You usually have most of the group leaders now working on production, so you don’t have that flexibility. So the company’s commitment on paper doesn’t transcend into commitment in terms of resources, and unless you have that flexibility of resources, you can’t expect people to do that flexibility.

She also felt that, too often, ‘the company’s so-called flexibility was a way of undermining the labour levels’. She gave the example of one employee who reduced his hours from full-time to two hours daily, but the company had continued to define his position as a full-time one and failed to replace him.

Moreover, instead of hiring new staff, the company preferred to pay the existing staff to do overtime. She could see the company was in a genuine dilemma between hiring enough people ‘to get that flexibility’ and keeping costs down in the interests of
survival. But the preference for overtime meant that the dilemma was passed on to the staff who had to decide whether they spent their time with their families or at work. Those decisions were not just economic ones about the extra money earned by working overtime; they also had to take into account the workload on other members of staff, as well as the possibility that refusing to do overtime might mean it was not offered when they really needed it.

Pressures
Employees felt personally driven to work long hours. They reported feeling uncomfortable if they had to leave early, for example, to go to a function for their child. They had internalised the expectation that they would work long hours and needed excuses for leaving work even at the normal knock-off time. A HR manager expressed the opinion that the justification for the heavy workload was ‘driven largely, I think, internally by people feeling that they need to have a good reason not to be here until six o’clock at night or whatever’ (HR Manager Two). But as one participant in the supervisors’ focus group said:

It's not just a fear. It's the other way around too, that unless you're prepared to do the hard hours, work until 9.00 [pm], you're really not the line we are looking to promote anyway. You know there's other blokes prepared to do that extra hard yards.

Costs
Opinions on whether or not flexible workplace options would cost very much varied, depending on where informants were situated in the organisation. Management tended towards the view that introducing flexible practices did not cost very much. The Vice-President quoted above on the benefits to the company of job-sharing (section 8.2), for example, said he had not noticed that they had been a detriment to the business (and he would have noticed, he said, since the business was ‘under huge cost pressure right now’). He had had people working for him in job-sharing arrangements for at least the last five years, and not only were there no extra costs, it usually worked to the company's advantage: ‘it's usually...a shared office and shared computer and...it's just the opposite. It's almost a cost benefit’. He also said he didn’t think the costs of telecommuting would be very great either, at least ‘from a facilities standpoint’—‘sometimes there are existing lap-tops that can be used and that sort of thing’ (HR Manager Four).
Informants in HR felt that, far from flexible work options being a drain on the company's resources, they were a remarkably cheap way of attracting and keeping staff. It was something the company could offer other than increased salaries, given how tight resources were.
Amongst employees, their partners and the union, however, there was widespread agreement that what was required for flexibility were ‘heads’, and that enough ‘heads’ were just what the company lacked given its tight budget. Whilst developing suitable flexibility arrangements was all well-and-good in theory, in the day-to-day work experience of employees there was too much to do in the span of their formal working hours and as a consequence, they did a lot of unpaid overtime. These, too, are costs. However, in this case, they are paid not by the company, but by the staff. When employees talked about needing ‘fewer hours’, they were not referring to the hours they were officially expected to work, but to the hours they worked on top of the official working day, hours for which they were not paid. It is here that the balance between work and family is undermined and work impinges heavily on family life.

The question of workload and how this impacts on the flexible work arrangements offered is not being addressed within the company, at least not in terms that make the connection between flexibility and resources. As the Union Representative said:

The company isn’t sitting back and saying, “Well, it has to come to a limit with how much overtime pressure we put on people because they’ve got families”. It’s not a question, it’s not looked at.

The Vice-President’s view that flexibility does not cost very much, for example, failed to take account of the higher staffing levels already necessary to enable employees to confine their working hours within the standard times specified in the EBA. The resources needed to facilitate better life and family balance by having a reasonable workload and reasonable standard hours of work, are not confined to the extra technical equipment in telecommuting or the slightly increased administration required to enable a job to be shared by two employees. As the Union Representative and the employees’ focus group stressed, the problem is the lack of additional staff and the high amount of overtime, especially when it is unpaid. The real link between lack of resources and men’s lack of use of flexibility provisions essentially boils down to staffing costs, and these clearly are demanding. In practice, this means that family-friendliness is a fine ideal but unrealistic given the work environment of the company.

The costs of the heavy workload, along with the uncertain economic environment that is used as its justification, are currently paid by the employees, whether or not they have families. Employees with families have insufficient time to be with them, while employees without families have to take up any slack created by fathers who take time off, with the consequent resentment on one side and guilt on the other. There is also stress on the families. Participants in the male employees’ group, for example, cited the high number of employees getting divorced as an indication of the workplace stress at the company and the impact on families. The costs borne by the staff are not simply metaphorical, the result of stress in people’s lives. They are also literal in the sense that the company’s employees provide the business with free labour.

The company uses resources of time and energy that it does not pay for.
13 Company number two

13.1 Introduction

Company number two is a corporatised public utility whose sole shareholder is a state Government. It provides water supply and sewerage services to one and a half million people, and its Operating Licence covers approximately 4034 square kilometres. In 2000-01, it owned and managed assets valued at more than $1.2 billion, had a total annual revenue of over $343 million and after-tax profits of $68.9 million, and paid dividends of $56 million. (Annual Report 2000–2001). In 2001, it had 380 employees, of whom 12 per cent were part-time and 48.4 per cent were female and 51.6 per cent male.

In 2002, the company in its present form was seven years old, having been established on 1 January 1995 after the restructure of the state's water industry. The industry itself and the amenities it provides are far older than that, and employees’ service is often longer, sometimes much longer. Indeed, the average time of employees’ service—8.69 years in 2001—is longer than the present age of the company, and some of the research participants had worked for the company and its predecessors for over 20 years.

The work of the company divides into six different areas, some of which are common to all commercial enterprises, some of which are specific to the water industry: Marketing and Business Strategy, Asset Services, Customer Operations, Finance and Corporate Services, Human Resources, and Plumbing.

The company is explicitly committed to enabling staff to maintain a balance between work and life. The Annual Report 2000–2001 states: ‘We work hard to give our people the best opportunities to balance their working and personal lives’ and during the previous year a number of programs had been introduced ‘to give staff more control over their personal work-life balance’. Among those mentioned were family leave and extended leave options, flexible hours, and guaranteed placements at a nearby childcare centre.

In October 2000, the company was given the inaugural ‘Work + Life + Balance’ award by the Institution of Engineers. It was estimated that all the work/life balance initiatives included in their application for the award would cost up to $100 000.
13.2 A family-friendly company?

Management: Reasons for the company’s family-friendliness

At the management level, there was overall agreement that this company was a family-friendly one, and a number of reasons were given for this. One reason was the personal influence of the managing director. According to one general manager, he was ‘very supportive of a family-friendly culture’:

> Our MD has always had, and always will have, a strong drive for people to have the ability to enjoy their families (Interview one).

A HR consultant agreed about the influence of the Managing Director, and added that the executive level in general recognised ‘that focusing on people issues is good business and produces the results that we’re looking for’. She also mentioned ‘a sense of community’ among employees that meant they took ‘responsibility for looking after each other’. She didn’t know how this had developed, but she thought it might have had something to do with the type of organisation it was, with ‘a strong sense of community and environmental good’, and of customer service as ‘helping out’. She also suggested that the fact that it was the water industry with ‘a certain level of ethics’ might attract community-minded people (Interview two).

A general manager also mentioned the water industry as a possible contributory factor to the company’s family-friendliness. Despite the need ‘to be very commercial these days and make sure that we’re running a very efficient business’, he said, the industry was originally a public service protecting public health:

> In the mid-1800s...typhoid and cholera were relatively common, so the water industry was established to get rid of those problems, to provide clean, safe water and take away the sewage and dispose of that effectively. And the motto of the old Board of Works, one of our predecessor organisations, was “Public health is my reward”.

He said many people worked for the company, ‘not for the salary (because they can get more money elsewhere)’, but because the company’s values and its care for the community suited them. ‘And I think that ethos reflects back on the way we deal with each other’, he said.

Like the HR consultant quoted above, he also attributed the company’s family-friendliness to ‘a very strong customer service ethos’. If employees ‘can develop empathy with customers’, he said, then they are also going to treat each other well.

Another factor he mentioned was the experience of the company’s decision-makers in ‘taking a balanced approach to decision-making’. They could not be concerned only with ‘the company as a financial entity’; they also had to take into consideration the
environmental and social impacts of their decisions. This influenced the way they treated staff. It is ‘not just a bottom line view of the world’, he said (Interview seven).

A senior HR consultant also attributed the company’s family-friendliness to the type of company it was, although not because it was a water company with its connotations of public service and community responsibility, but because it had a history of good social policy. He said that, in 1979, when he was first employed by the present company’s predecessor, women already had maternity leave, and that ‘a lot of those things had been in place for 20 or more years. It’s been an evolving matter’. He also said that the fact that the company was ‘a government-owned organisation’ meant that ‘we do have certain constraints with salaries’ and that, therefore, ‘we have to look at other ways of compensating people’ (Interview five).

The first General Manager quoted above also mentioned the fact that the company was ‘a government business enterprise’ as one reason for its support for work-life balance, not because of any need to compensate for constraints on salaries, but because (like the general manager in Interview seven) she felt it was not focused solely on the bottom line. In sum, she said:

When you’ve got that combination of your shareholders [the state Government], not just supportive of it, they’re asking for it, your MD’s totally behind it, and the pressures to conform are out there in the market place as well, then obviously you’ve got the perfect atmosphere to have great programs. And I think we do have good programs here (Interview one)

**Employees**

There were some employees who agreed. A non-union employee representative even saw the company as ‘a leader in that area at the present time’. He felt they were much further ahead than the firm his wife worked for, and that they had come so far in such a short time it was ‘unbelievable’ (Interview six).

One of the supervisors said she thought the company was pretty good on the whole. Another agreed, adding that she knew of ‘a number of instances where the company’s gone out of their way to support people with their family and extra leave’.

Other employees were more ambivalent. At first, the consensus tended to be fairly negative:

I think they like the idea as a concept because it’s…a value they would like to have.

Can I be really cynical? We like winning awards.

I’m more optimistic. I think there is a commitment to do those things…”
There’s not a great deal of action on the ground, though, is there? ['Nup']
There’s not a great deal of things to see going on around the place that are supportive of family-friendly type things. There’s not a great deal of leadership there.

No, there’s not. [There is] at the supervisor level…But if you looked at the business up here…I don’t think it comes together very well.

Do we have the flexibility only because we’re able to work things out at a local level? Or is it something culturally that the company commits to? Personally, I think it’s because we work out things well at a local level.

But ‘working things out at a local level’, and ‘something culturally that the company commits to’, are not mutually exclusive options. As will become clear later, working things out locally and informally is a major aspect of the cultural milieu within the company.

Another employee voiced an even harsher criticism. In his opinion, he said, ‘there’s a degree of guilt-driven flexibility here’. By this he meant that the company worked people so hard they could not possibly refuse any reasonable request for time off:

The business demands a lot of employees…You couldn’t have someone work there doing that extra bit for no extra pay at six o’clock, and the next day knock them back for a hour off to go and drop the kids off at school. Whether it’s guilt or something else, but I suspect that [the company] just can’t always ask and not give.

This comment met with general agreement. It raises the question of the heavy workload that was such an important feature of the workplace environments in both these companies (discussed in more detail in sections 12.7 and 18.5). In this employee’s view, being able to take time off during the working day to attend to family matters was no more than the company already owed its employees.

A supervisor made the same point. ‘Generally’, he said, ‘most people are working well in excess of…their standard hours’. Since that was the case, there had to be some ‘give-and-take’ on the company’s part.

The male employees were not sure that management even knew when staff took time off to be with their families. One man said that was probably because it was arranged at a local level. In other words, he was saying, not so much that the executive team did not know about the arrangements, but that they were happy with them and chose not to interfere.

On further reflection, employees felt that management was supportive of families and what was needed to spend time with them. One man said, ‘Perhaps we’re a bit harsh
on our senior management’, while another one said he believed that ‘the senior management does understand the need for flexibility’.

When asked about the chief ways in which the company contributed to work-family balance, a union representative said, ‘They’re very good with the flexibility of hours, certainly in our area anyway…and with time-in-lieu’. She also mentioned the 48–52 provision in the last EBA, which was specifically meant to help parents with school holidays (Interview eight).

Another union representative was even enthusiastic about the company (although she did modify that enthusiasm somewhat in relation to the workload):

> As a company to work for, they're great. The conditions in the EB[A] are great. If you've got a problem, they're very cooperative, very understanding, and they will help you as much as they can. From that perspective I think [the company]'s fantastic (Interview four).

**Two different environments**

As in the case of company number one, company number two also has different working environments. Although it does not have the two separate worksites, it does have two distinctly different kinds of working conditions. As many of the participants in the research pointed out, the possibility of using flexible work arrangements to balance work and family life depended on which area of the company you worked in.

As a supervisor said, ‘There’s no doubt there are two parts to the business’. He went on to instance ‘Customer Ops and the Call Centre’ (also referred to as Contact Centres) as areas of the business that ‘run very differently to everywhere else’. These are, he said, ‘very rigid…Some flexibility is allowed now, but it’s very minimal’. One of the male employees said:

> That's like working in a factory. You've got to be there, you've got to sit on the phones...You're rostered on for a particular time, that's it. There's no flexibility in that, that's your time on.

Another employee did think there was some flexibility, ‘you can always tee up with someone else to take your shift and swap shifts’. The first man agreed, but said that the ‘commitment to do things at a certain time and have a certain number of people on’ meant that ‘it does become for them very much more the production line’.

A supervisor gave more detail about these inflexibilities. Earlier, someone had made the point that planned absences from work, even at odd times (e.g. leaving at 4.00 pm, rather than 5.30 pm), could be worked around; it was the unplanned absences that were ‘tough’. This supervisor pointed out that, in the area she worked, even those kinds of planned absences were problematic. The way the work was arranged did not really allow for variations in starting and finishing times.
A HR general manager pointed out that the Call Centre also had time constraints because of training requirements. There was:

An awful lot of training involved in a Call Centre operation, both up-front...and...on-going...the actual work-time of an eight-hour-a-day person is maybe six hours a day on average. There’s a huge cost involved in that, and to then have unplanned absences on top of it is very difficult (Interview one).

A general manager said that the constraints were particularly hard on the Call Centre manager. She had ‘the unenviable task’, he said, ‘of juggling everyone’s requirements to come up with something everyone can live with and meet most people’s needs’. He said that, under those conditions, it was impossible to satisfy everyone (Interview three).

It was also pointed out, however, that working arrangements in the Call Centre could have advantages for balancing work and family life. As a HR general manager said, there are ‘part-time and job-sharing arrangements, and we’ve got some people on specific shifts because they can’t start before this time or they’ve got to finish before this time’ (Interview one). A senior HR consultant also mentioned part-time work and said there was ‘some flexibility with the rosters’ (Interview five). A HR consultant said the Call Centre ‘can accommodate a lot of part-time arrangements’ and that there were a lot of staff who chose to work there for that very reason. She went on to say, though, that ‘it certainly is a fairly rigid environment where they don’t have the flexibility to just pop out to do their shopping or whatever it might be’ (Interview two).

In the light of these difficulties, the Call Centre is obviously critical for work and family balance policies in the company overall. It is the equivalent of the production line at company number one where employees are on timed shifts and paid by the hour. There is some flexibility available in the form of part-time work—indeed, the Call Centre is more conducive to part-time work than any other area of the company. But the opportunities for taking brief periods of time off for emergencies are limited or unavailable. As one supervisor pointed out, ‘unplanned time…must be taken as sick leave’. Because staff in her area were rostered on for fixed shifts, there was no provision for taking time off one day and making it up another day.

The contrasting environment, which makes up the rest of the workplace (the supervisor quoted above simply referred to it as ‘everywhere else’), was described in a number of ways. Sometimes the contrasting environment was referred to in terms of ‘senior people’. As a HR general manager put it, ‘the more senior people probably don’t go through the same formalities’ when they want to take leave as the ‘lower levels of staff’ do (Interview one).

Sometimes it was in terms of ‘professional people’. A general manager said he had a small group of professionals working for him, ‘of business analysts and project managers [who] work completely differently on different things, have different
experience and qualifications’ from the people who work in the Call Centre. ‘They’re self-starters’, he said, ‘they manage their own time, to a certain degree set their [own] priorities’.

He also saw it in terms of different kinds of people, ‘younger people who are university-qualified, who are very career-oriented’ in ‘the project area’ on the one hand, and ‘more mature’ people at the Call Centre on the other. But the real difference, in this manager’s view, was that those who worked in the Call Centre were ‘not the prime source of income for their families’ (Interview three).

The male employees couched the contrast in terms of the Call Centre and ‘us’. (The male employees’ focus group did not include anyone from the Call Centre). As one man said:

In our work group, we’re flexible. There’s an understanding that if there’s a special event, a special need, you can make arrangements to attend it even if it’s in the middle of the day. That’s like a cultural thing in each group, and our culture where we work, if you’ve got some family needs, you can take the time and make it up later on.

Others pointed out that it was not always as easy as that. Not only were there deadlines that had to be covered before you could leave the workplace, sometimes those deadlines involved ‘something that’s just sprung up’. As one man explained:

If we had a system problem, like an incident where we were close to running out of water, or a major main, a big burst...for example, a water quality scare or something like that, there’s probably guys and myself in my area, in the operations area, that would struggle to then leave to go to something personal.

Another employee said that flexibility depended on ‘the type of work you do’, and that those who had to deal with these kinds of emergencies had no choice about work demands—‘They’re on call, they’re rostered on’. In contrast, he said, ‘an office that’s paper-based, information-based, allows you that flexibility’. A general manager said he had been able to accommodate a part-time arrangement for one of his staff members because she was not ‘in the front line dealing with customers on a daily basis’ (Interview seven).

Leaving aside the need to deal with emergencies, the environment that allowed for the greatest flexibility of work arrangements was one where the emphasis was on outcomes and getting things done, rather than staff having to be present at particular times. It was also an environment that worked on trust. These issues will be discussed further in sections 15.5 and 15.2.
14  Formal policy

14.1 In the Award and the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA)

The Award
Informtion on the Award is taken from the company's Award 2000. It contains a number of provisions that can be used by employees to facilitate their balancing of work and family responsibilities.

Annual leave (s. 28):
Annual leave is four weeks (‘152 hours’) after 12 months continuous service for full-time employees (pro-rata for part-time employees). There is provision for an extra week’s leave (‘38 hours’) for those shift workers who are regularly rostered on Sundays and public holidays, or 3.17 hours for each month so rostered. Annual leave must be taken in at least one continuous period of two weeks (‘76 hours’). The other two weeks can be taken in periods of not less than half a day, except for two days per annum that can be taken in two-hour blocks. The wishes of employees will be taken into consideration in approving annual leave, ‘as far as is practicable’, although the convenience of ‘the needs of the company’ has priority. Unless leave is taken within 18 months, the company will determine when it has to be taken. There is provision for annual leave to be taken in advance, that is, prior to the employee having served a full 12 months, and for the company to get a refund from any employee who leaves the company before accruing sufficient service to justify the leave. There is also provision for the company to close down over the Christmas-/New Year period and require employees to take annual leave at that time, including leave without pay in the case of employees who have not accrued sufficient entitlement to paid leave.

Personal/carer’s leave (s. 29)
Personal/carer’s leave is 136.8 hours per year, available for absences due to: the employee’s own illness (sick leave); caring for an immediate family or household member (carer’s leave); or the death of an immediate family or household member (bereavement leave). This is made up of three weeks of sick leave (‘114 hours’), plus another three days of leave that can be used as carer’s or bereavement leave without impinging on the sick leave entitlement. Unused portions of sick leave accrue from year to year, but the extra three days does not. One week of sick leave (‘38 hours’) per year can be used as carer’s leave.

Parental leave (s. 30)
Parental leave is 52 weeks, unpaid, after 12 months of continuous service, available to one parent at a time, except for one week immediately following the birth of a child, or three weeks following adoption. The conditions are the same for maternity and
paternity leave. They differ, however, in that maternity leave can be taken up to six weeks before the birth of the child.

**Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA)**

Information on the EBA is taken from the company's Enterprise Agreement 2000. The current EBA is valid to July 2003 (or after that date until new agreement has been negotiated).

**Annual leave**

3.9.1 As in the Award. (a) In addition, the EBA allows employees to convert to sick leave five or more ordinary working days of their annual leave if they were sick during that time.

**Sick leave**

3.9.3 As in the Award. (d) In addition, ‘the Company undertakes to consider cases of genuine hardship, where an individual has run out of accrued sick leave’.

**Parental leave**

3.9.4 As in the Award. In addition, there is provision for:

- paid maternity leave for 12 weeks
- paid paternity leave for five days which need not be taken consecutively, can be taken up to a week prior to the expected date of the birth, and must be taken not later than six weeks afterwards
- six weeks paid adoption leave for female employees, and five days for male employees
- part-time employment with the right of return to the employee's former position:
  - for male employees, from the birth of a child to its second birthday (or, in the case of an adopted child, until the second anniversary of its placement)
  - for female employees, during pregnancy and from the seventh week after the birth of a child until its second birthday (or, in the case of an adopted child, until the second anniversary of its placement).

**Key work-life initiatives**

The key work-life issues, ‘introduced, formalised or restated in the EBA 2000’ (s. 4.3), were listed in the company's application for the 2001 ACCI National Work and Family Awards. They were:

- greater ability of staff to work part-time
- 48–52 arrangement—allows staff to take eight weeks annual leave with an annualised salary
- working from home
- paid dependent-care for staff expected to attend out-of-hours meetings or training
- provision of leave and facilities for staff who are breastfeeding
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

- family leave (over and above sick leave), including access to Leave Without Pay in exceptional circumstances
- [a combination of Employment for Specified Time or Purpose [and] Permanent Part Time Employment (PPTE) will facilitate negotiated wage reductions for extended leave (e.g. 48-52 arrangements)
- job sharing is essentially facilitated by PPTE
- Employment for Specified Time or Purpose within the extended spread of hours or alternate days of the week may assist greatly in balancing business needs and meeting the individual’s needs
- reserved child care facilities already exist and are supported by [the company] through an annual contribution of $12,000
- flexi or banked time facility is already available to working mothers to facilitate reasonable absence from work to attend child care
- [the company] is a member of the Work/Life Association
- promotion of work-life balance through the Corporate Health Program, Health Wellness and Nutrition Programs and Gender Health Programs
- consideration of cases of genuine hardship, where an individual has run out of accrued sick leave. To date, all situations have been approved and we have continued to pay sick leave.

14.2 Informants’ comments on the policies

As should be clear from what the male employees said above, their knowledge of these provisions was vague. Moreover, when asked if leave to care for children came out of sick leave entitlements, some male employees clearly didn’t know what the company offered:

There is a provision to take sick leave if you’re got to look after sick kids or dependents.

It’s called ‘family leave’.

It comes off your normal sick leave...five days, I think it is.

I know we’ve got provision for sick leave which includes family leave and annual leave. In your divisional level, it’s whatever suits.

Getting the information out to staff

A number of interviewees felt that information was not getting out to staff. A senior HR consultant said he thought that there were ‘a lot of people, particularly among the males, that probably aren’t even aware of some of the provisions’. He said HR bore
some responsibility for that and they ‘could probably promote things better’. But he also believed there was ‘a very strong culture’ amongst the male employees that their wives would look after the children when they were sick. Even some of the women saw that as their role as well, he said (Interview five).

Another HR consultant agreed that HR could probably do more in ‘helping employees and managers to better understand what options there are’, although she also said that employees already came to HR for that kind of support (Interview two).

A non-union employee representative also thought people were probably not aware of their leave entitlements, and that ‘this organisation’s got to sell their family-friendly views, especially towards the leave, a little bit harder’. When asked how he thought this could be done, he suggested advertising on the company website: ‘let’s tell them about how family-friendly this organisation is’ (Interview six).

Again, one of the union representatives said that people didn’t know about a lot of the company’s provisions. She had people coming to her and saying, ‘What is that 48–52?’ six months after it had been included in the EBA. She said it works both ways—people can find out what they’re entitled to—but that ‘perhaps there is something we could do in terms of advertising those a bit more’ (Interview eight).

A number of informants mentioned the importance of training managers. A general manager put it in terms of ‘the attitudinal-philosophical aspects’, not just the programs. ‘We need to have an agreed position in the company’, he said, ‘and bring our managers along’:

> If you get the principles right and everyone understanding the principles, you can take it from there (Interview three).

There were a number of ways in which information about policies was conveyed to staff. The HR General Manager said that people are told about them through their electronic induction when they first start working for the company. HR has plans to expand the coverage of work-life balance policies at that point, while also ‘to try and impart the culture that we’re trying to build and the philosophy of the company’ (Interview one). There are other avenues of communication: the team briefings; the company’s newsletter; the MD’s update; management team meetings; and management training. All policies are also published on the internet to which everyone has access. She went on to say that one of the main issues with getting information out to staff was not primarily ‘publicising them (which is just one small part of it)’. What she felt was more important was:

> Having people understand that it’s okay to take them up, and that we do want them to take them up. What makes it so hard is that...the one you turned down is the one everybody gets to know about, and the nine you okayed no one hears about. So we’ve also got to look at a way of celebrating some of the things that we do (Interview one).
Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

Paternity leave
About paternity leave, employees' partners (if not the male employees themselves) were perfectly clear. When asked what the company's provision for paternity leave was, all the partners knew it was 'one week of paid leave'. When asked if it came out of sick leave provisions, there was a chorus of, 'No, it's completely separate'.

One woman said that she and her husband had used paternity leave twice in the last two years, while a number of other women agreed that they had used it too. The first woman commented that it had 'been absolutely fantastic' and that she 'couldn't believe it that some of my friends' husbands didn't get it'. Another woman said that she and her husband had 'put another two weeks of annual leave on the end of that, with the second child'. Other women said that their husbands had done that too. All agreed it was possible for their husbands to take three weeks paid leave for the birth of a child.

Limits to formal policies
There was overall agreement that there were limits to what could be achieved by way of formal policies. As one general manager put it:

Managers need to understand and cater for the individual, and policies will never do that...You can't possibly cover every scenario by policies.

Later in the interview she commented:

In an ideal world, we wouldn't need the policies because...the company and all the managers would be supportive, and the staff would know about it...But that's utopia. So the policies provide a backdrop. They give the messages to the staff and the managers (Interview one).

From these comments, it is clear that there is no distinction between company philosophy and explicit policy on the one hand, and local arrangements on the other (as the employee quoted above thought). In fact, working through supervisors at the local level just is the company's overall strategy.
15 Informal arrangements at the local level

15.1 Informal arrangements

All participants in the research emphasised that balancing work and family largely happened through informal arrangements. Employees, supervisors and management all mentioned these arrangements and gave positive reports of the way they operated. An employee said, ‘I couldn’t say that I know too many policies or offerings, you just have a good arrangement in your local area’, while a general manager said:

At a local level, managers have a lot of discretion on management of those things, and it’s not written down anywhere, I don’t think. But when you’ve been here a while you tend to pick that up pretty quickly and understand that’s the way we operate (Interview seven)

A HR consultant saw it in terms of being able to meet people’s needs, ‘rather than just have a blanket policy that has to fit anyone’, because the company was small enough to adapt to individual circumstances (Interview two).

A supervisor said that sometimes the staff arrange these things amongst themselves, even before coming to him with requests for time off:

They sort it out amongst themselves because they realise that there are certain commitments and responsibilities that need to be met, and once they’ve got those covered then, if someone wants to leave early, fine (Supervisors’ focus group).

15.2 Trust

The key to these informal arrangements is trust. As one supervisor put it:

The guys know what they work, they know the hours they’ve got to work. There’s no sign on-sign off. It’s based on trust, so that’s where the absolute discretion comes from. There’s a company policy, but we don’t follow it. Mine’s a pretty small team so it’s very easy to do. [Other areas] are a lot bigger, so they rely on their team managers to know their people and know whether they can trust them or not, I suppose (Supervisors’ focus group).
And a HR consultant said:

We don’t have a centralised way of monitoring work hours. It's a flexible working week of 38 hours, and when and how those are worked operates on a trust basis (Interview two).

The employees agreed that trust is very much involved in the local informal arrangements, but they tended to feel that it was not sufficiently recognised. One employee said:

One of the critical things that doesn’t get credence is trust. The flexibility we talk about is based simply and solely on trust. We trust other people to do what they said they’d do, we trust the fact that the job will get done, we trust all those things to happen. The executive, because it's another step away, looks at it and says, “We like all these things, we want that to happen, but can we trust them? If we let this happen, will the job get done? Can we trust them to actually do what we think they’re going to do? Can we let go?” (Male employees’ focus group).

I think this organisation is recognising that people will do the job, that what is asked happens. I think there is, certainly within this business, a culture of excellence, to get it done as quickly as possible, with whatever means it takes to do it. “Fix it” is common...”just fix it. Get it done”. That will happen. But the element of trust to let that happen has been eroded to some extent because there’s been this constant focus [on] “Why aren’t you doing it? Get it done. Get in there”. If you trust us, it’ll happen (Male employees’ focus group).

15.3 Examples of informal arrangements in action

Informants cited a number of instances of flexible arrangements organised to fit in with employees’ needs in other areas of their lives than work. One supervisor gave the example of a female staff member who normally worked Monday to Thursday with Friday off:

Recently, there’s been a need for her to have a Monday off for family reasons, and I’ve said, “That’s fine. You work Tuesday to Friday”. The net hours are the same...[But] it would depend on the role that that person was doing.

Another supervisor mentioned an arrangement with a female employee to work 38 hours a week over four days. He said he had ‘sat down and had a look at the needs of
the team and who was in and where and why' and found that it would not cause any problems for the rest of the team. 'It worked really well actually', he said.

A general manager talked about the leeway he had given one male employee whose wife was terminally ill. He said he'd taken it upon himself to tell him to take it easy and not to load him up with work. He felt this would be to the company's benefit because 'at the end of the day, I think we'll come out of it very strong and he'll be really effective'. He said that this kind of arrangement was 'hard to write down and formalise', that it was 'just an attitude that you have to have in management' (Interview three).

A senior HR consultant gave what he saw as a good example of flexible use of the formal maternity leave provisions. Someone had asked if it was possible to vary the provisions so that she could take six months part-time leave instead of the stipulated three months full-time. He said that, because this had obvious advantages for the company as well as the employee—'instead of having that budget fully paid for but not utilised for a three-month period, you've got half a resource for a longer period of time'—there were no problems in agreeing to it (Interview five).

A number of informants gave the example of a manager (who had since left the company) who only came into work four days a week and worked from home the other day in order to look after his very young child. The same HR consultant saw this as one 'of the more successful uses of family-friendly provisions by males'. On the day this man wasn't in at work, he was still 'accessible at home by the phone and was always there if you needed him'. The HR consultant said that the company had come to this arrangement because they wanted to retain this man's services. He 'was considered someone with a lot of potential and had been designated as someone that was going to go further in the organisation'. He also said that this situation 'was seen very positively' by everyone (Interview five).

One of the participants in the male employees' focus group, however, said that he had 'felt the impact' of this manager being in at work for only four days. He had needed 'a fair amount of his input' and thought he had 'lost a day here and there because he wasn’t available'. He said the same situation sometimes arose with two other people who worked part-time in his division, although that was less important because he was now 'more aware of it'. He also said that 'the more the awareness grows the less of an impact it has, I think'.

15.4 The best way

There was unanimous agreement among all participants that informal arrangements at the local level were the best way to create a workplace favourable to balancing work and family. One of the male employees commented that more formal arrangements—
Informal arrangements at the local level

‘making it a business rule’—would be ‘bureaucratic’, and there was general agreement in the group that that would make them ‘unmanageable’: ‘It can’t work’; ‘It’ll all stop’.

A general manager felt that the informality was not only ‘highly valued by people’, it was also the most efficient way to operate because flexibility ‘doesn’t need control’:

There’s a real danger in writing it down…You could end up trying to control something that’s not broken (Interview seven).

Informal arrangements were seen to be an aspect of the company’s culture, of the ways in which the practices could be made meaningful to people and elicit their cooperation and consent, rather than being imposed from above. One supervisor said:

To me, that’s the best way to make something stay and be used and actually grow because it’s part of the culture, this is the way we do things. If you start writing down rules, it’s constraining you to conform…..by building a culture based on the values I think the company has, you’ve got a very strong foundation to make things work beautifully (Supervisors’ focus group).

A general manager agreed that what was needed was a favourable cultural climate. People needed to feel comfortable with flexible work practices, and to see them in terms of a broader perspective than simply through narrow self-interest:

What I don’t want to happen is that people then suddenly decide it’s their right and they want it written into contracts or they want it written into a policy. Then we will have failed because it’s not inherent in the culture, and it’s something people are still feeling uncomfortable about. And that is an issue. We’ve got an EBA here, we’ve got a couple of unions on site…[But!] I want it to be a dynamic thing that grows and lives and changes. As soon as you say…”Everybody’s got to get exactly the same thing”…that’s the problem with collective bargaining…then it’ll all disappear. Apart from anything else, we’ve also got to grow a culture among our people that’s accepting that, “OK, she gets this but, hey, I get this. It doesn’t matter [that we don’t get the same thing]…She’s getting what she needs and I’m getting what I need. So it’s okay” (Interview one).

15.5 Outcomes

The over-riding issue, everyone agreed, was whether or not staff produced what they were expected to produce. If the relevant outcomes were being achieved, how or when that was done was largely irrelevant. As one general manager said, ‘If the person could get it done in six hours, good luck to them. It really is about outcomes’ (Interview three). Another general manager said, ‘As far as I’m concerned, so long as my staff
produce what they have to produce...then the hours they work...shouldn’t really
matter’ (Interview one).

Another general manager gave more detail:

There was a time in our history when we had time clocks and keys...and we had flexi-days and nine-day fortnights...it was terrible. You just turned people into clock-watchers when they don’t want to be, they have no choice. But that all disappeared years and years ago. Now we try to make it as clear as we can about what’s expected of a person in their job. So we have a lot of key performance indicators which are monitored on a regular basis; every team should know what their key performance indicators are and how they’re going. We have performance plans as well, one of the objectives [of which is] that requirements are written down for individuals as well to make it as clear as possible. So employees generally do know what they’re doing...Providing they do all that, we’re not too fussed about whether they spend six, eight hours or 10 hours a day really. And if someone comes in and says, “I’ve got to go to the doctor’s”, or “I need to go home early today”, 99 times out of 100 I wouldn’t even expect them to ask me. If someone’s not at their desk at three o’clock, I’m not going to lose any sleep over that. But if that person’s not delivering on the outcomes that we’ve agreed to, well, I do get worried about that. That might then lead to a discussion [along the lines of] ”You’re not here all that much. Are you at home studying? Or have you gone to visit customers? What’s the story?” (Interview seven).

15.6 Problems with informality

This shift in emphasis, from fixed hours of attendance to the setting of goals to be achieved, seems at first sight to be an improvement in working conditions, and that is certainly the way this manager interpreted it. Ideally, it means people can set their own pace, arrange tasks to suit themselves and work at their own speed. Unfortunately, the reality of the workplace is very far from this ideal given the heavy workloads which are commonplace these days (see sections 12.7 and 18.5). An outcomes-based workplace is only an improvement on a ‘clock-watching’ one if the objectives set are reasonable and the workloads manageable within the standard working day. As became abundantly clear throughout this research, however, this is far from being the case. If employees consistently work longer days than specified in their award, if they never take lunch breaks or time-in-lieu, if they sometimes can’t even take their annual leave, if work threatens to become the whole of life rather than something left behind at the end of the day, they are not better off than they would be under a system of fixed hours. Although management at this company was explicitly opposed to over-working employees (as the comments of some of the managers indicated), if the evidence from
male employees and their partners is any guide, that management stance is not being
translated into practice.

As was the case with company number one, the people at this company also
acknowledged there could be problems with the informality (although the question of
overwork wasn’t raised in this context). The manager who was in four days a week was
reported by one HR consultant to have said at his exit interview that he himself had
been given all these options, but ‘how does someone else know about them and access
them?’ The HR consultant admitted that, in the case of a valued employee, the company
did tend to ‘bend over backwards to meet their needs’, but that ‘that won’t apply
consistently’ (Interview two).

A supervisor pointed out that, because the way informal arrangements worked
depended on the particular manager, there could be problems for people with
unsympathetic managers:

I do think it comes down to your local area manager, which can be good.
Some are better than others at being more flexible, which can pose a
problem for those people whose managers are not so understanding,
because it is not something that’s formally written down, it is just by
negotiation.

A general manager was also worried about unevennesses in applying the policies.
She was concerned that informality might work best for those already comparatively
privileged, while those with difficulty standing up for themselves might lose out.
Nonetheless, she felt the benefits outweighed the risks:

There’s a risk that those closest to the sun’ll get the best, that people’s
perceptions about others will come into play and some people might be
discriminated against. That’s the risk you take when you try and do this.
[But] I believe it’s worth the risks, and we try and manage them so that we
get outside the rigidity of policies...I’d rather have one or two issues than
say, “No, don’t do anything at all just in case” (Interview one).

Another manager perceived that some areas of the business might have difficulties
accommodating employees’ requirements for flexible working arrangements, because
part-time positions and flexible working hours had already reached saturation point:

From time to time, and it probably has increased a little more lately
because...part-time positions and flexible working hours we have really
done to a great extent, we’re starting to get to the position now
where...certain areas of the business are saying, “No, I can’t
accommodate that need”.


She said that was not always the end of the matter, though. For one thing, management had to make sure that the policies had been applied consistently. She also said HR could play a mediating role between employee and supervisor, and attempt to arrange a compromise by ‘looking for other parts of the company that may have opportunities’ or ‘go down the job-share path, try and team that person up with someone else’ (Interview five).

There was also the problem that some people’s use of flexible working arrangements might mean that others had to take on more work, although there was some disagreement about this. One supervisor was inclined to think that wouldn’t happen as long as the manager was doing his job: ‘From what I’ve seen there wouldn’t be [any impact on the workloads of other employees]. If there were, you’d be managing it differently’. Another supervisor tended to disagree. He thought that anyone who left work early ‘could not be as productive as everybody else’, and hence that the workload of the team would increase: ‘We still [need to] achieve the output, but the work would be split up over the remaining two, three, four people’. At the same time, he wasn’t sure about this, since finding out would mean ‘almost micro-managing someone, so I can’t get down to that level and say whether it affects them or not’.

Another supervisor did see that the workloads of others were increased when people left work early, mainly because he himself tended to take up the slack:

I have noticed that when people have left earlier, with the internet being what it is, the beauty of it is that you can get access to your information from home, and it’s also a burden. What’ll happen is, we have to get something finished and that person has gone home early, I’ll tend to do [it], and I can do that from home. So I think there’s a trap there.

15.7 Solving the problems

The company’s HR team is well aware that there can be problems with informality and has taken steps to remedy them. One task, as the General Manager sees it, is maintaining consistency across the business. She pointed out that:

One of the roles of HR is to monitor that, in those informal practices, there is consistency...one of the things we’re to be careful in monitoring is that there’s equal opportunity to those acceptable practices across the business.

When asked how HR went about establishing consistency, she acknowledged it was difficult, ‘because you can’t monitor individually what every manager does with their employees’. She said that what was necessary was ‘to set a standard and a philosophy around the company’, and then talked about the mechanics of doing that through the regular management meetings and performance reviews.
She mentioned entering the ACCI Awards as a way of publicising the company's commitment to family-friendliness, and said they had internal publications within the business 'to tell people this is what we do and this is what is allowable within the company'. She also said that some of HR’s key performance indicators involved increasing the numbers of people ‘participating in some of these opportunities’.

She felt that ‘one way or another we get to know about a problem’, although that was dependent on their being able ‘to get out there amongst the people, and have that trust between us’. She pointed out, however, that there were limits to the lengths HR could go in giving people leeway. While the company ‘is very generous with a lot of what they do’, there has to be ‘an element of drawing the line because we are a business and we’ve got budgets to meet that need the time and attendance of people’.

When asked if the focus was on the thinking behind the policy rather than the letter of the policy itself, she said, ‘Absolutely…I’d much rather help people to develop their own thinking, because if you step back and look at it from a very high view, the bottom line is that employees that are happy work better’ (Interview one).
16 The benefits of work-life balance

16.1 Happy employees

A number of participants in the research mentioned keeping employees happy as one major benefit of work-life balance policies. As one supervisor put it:

Your family’s so important, and a happy person at home is generally a very good worker at work. And you get such a huge payback with a happy person…I just know that somebody who’s very happy and very comfortable with managing life outside of work is a much better person inside…my father-in-law…used to say to me…‘You work to live, not live to work’. That’s a great philosophy.

A senior HR consultant mentioned loyalty as one of the benefits of keeping employees happy. He said that women especially appreciated the opportunity to work part-time when they had school-age children:

The work-life balance really does give a loyalty and makes them feel a great deal more part of the company (Interview five).

The non-union representative said that, in his view, the company was now ‘starting to move into an environment where we understand what the employees’ needs are’, and that it was trying ‘to deliver those requirements’. He said this will mean that ‘all of a sudden we end up with a super-duper employee who loves getting out of bed and coming to work, instead of [someone who is] an employee [only] because he or she needs to pay the bills every fortnight’ (Interview six).

16.2 Productivity

This informant believed that keeping employees happy benefited the company because ‘if you’ve got a happy family, a happy employee…you have good production’ (Interview six).

In fact there was general agreement that keeping staff happy led to greater productivity. A HR consultant said that, although it was hard to measure, it was clear that productivity must be one of the benefits of a more flexible workplace, ‘if what’s preventing someone from being productive at work is taken care of or better balanced’ (Interview two).
A general manager said:

If we're customer-focused, we'll recognise that satisfied staff deliver good service. And one aspect of satisfied staff is work-life balance... so work-life balance means that people are going to be more effective, and we'll get the outcomes that we want. And those outcomes are around cost reduction and service improvement. If you get the work-life balance right, your [staff] turnover goes down... the customer satisfaction goes up. All of these things feed on each other.

More specifically, he pointed to the necessity 'to eliminate re-work and errors'. He said driving people hard and focusing only on efficiency can lead to a 'spinning wheel effect where... you have all these unintended consequences downstream, of errors, re-work, complaints. It's a spiral' (Interview three).

Another general manager also believed that happy employees were more productive employees:

The basic philosophy we have is that happy employees produce good customer service, and that's what the company's about... If you work in a company where you think the employer has your best interests at heart, you're going to be happier, you're going to be more productive, it's going to be a better place for everybody to work, including me.

He also believed that gratitude had a role to play in employees’ productivity. He gave the example of two female employees in his work group, both single mothers, one of whom wanted annual leave of six weeks rather than four, the other of whom wanted to work part-time (four days a week). In the case of the first woman he pointed out that, while the extra two weeks leave was not likely to inconvenience the company to any great extent, it was very important to her. Refusing her request would have had a negative effect on her work and commitment to the company, whereas granting it had meant she felt 'much better about the company than she did before':

So here's an employee that is going to be more productive and more committed in the future. I think that's a win-win.

In the case of the second woman, too, letting her work four days a week was not going to cost the company much. On the contrary, not only did they retain her skills, she would probably work even harder than she had before, given how grateful she was for the opportunity (Interview seven).

One of the male employees agreed that people worked harder for an employer who had a flexible approach to the needs of employees. ‘You tend to put in more than you would with an organisation that wasn’t [flexible]’, he said.
16.3 Retaining staff

Informants also pointed out that keeping employees happy was a good way to keep staff. A HR consultant said, ‘It’s sending a message to employees [of] being valued and being treated as whole people, rather than just workers’. She also mentioned ‘the benefits that go with that—reduced costs of retraining employees, etc’ (Interview two).

A general manager also mentioned the reduced costs involved if the company did not have to retrain employees. When asked if a high staff turnover meant that costs would skyrocket, he said, ‘Ours would, for sure, because some of our systems [in the Call Centre] are a bit cumbersome’. He went on to say that another way of reducing retraining costs was ‘making sure the systems are simple’, while ‘burning people out’ because ‘it’s all too hard’. He thought this was called ‘the "sacrificial Call Centre strategy" or something like that’, but the company did not approve of it—‘it’s a shocker’. He said that companies that adopted such methods were ‘not really thinking about their customers in doing that’ (Interview three).

But the costs of retraining staff were not confined to the Call Centre. A senior HR consultant felt that the cost of staff turnover was greater in the case of ‘high calibre staff or staff that have a number of years experience’. He said that ‘estimates are one to one-and-a-half times their salary in cost to the business’. He also said that the company’s turnover ‘has reduced significantly over the last couple of years’, although HR were not taking all the credit for that, since ‘there are other reasons than just having work-life and balance initiatives for that—it’s the whole economic environment outside the business’ (Interview five).

16.4 Attracting staff

Another benefit was the possibility of attracting staff. As one general manager put it:

> It’s an important selling point. Here we are stuck out in [name of town]. We’re not in the big smoke, so when it comes to attracting senior people, there’s other things have got to be in play, that come to bear. And we don’t pay as well as the private sector, so what else have we got to offer? (Interview three).

According to a senior HR consultant, it would seem that the word has already got out about the company’s family-friendliness. He said two of the three applicants he screened for the job of IT Manager had ‘raised the issue and knew that we were known for being good both with developing staff and with work-life balance’ (Interview five).
16.5 The broader community

It is not only the company that benefits from family-friendly policies and work-life initiatives. There is also a broader benefit to the community more generally. As a HR consultant said:

If you're specifically talking about people with family responsibilities, then allowing them to juggle those demands with their work has to have a community benefit. But I like to think of work-life balance in the more broad sense where people have other interests, whether they're sport or religious or whatever, outside interests or hobbies they have. I think they'd have a positive impact. Ideally, you would hope that these sorts of initiatives help towards creating people with a more balanced and good self-esteem and stable emotional well-being which makes them better corporate citizens (Interview two).

16.6 Disadvantages

While participants in the research were usually positive about the company’s work-life balance initiatives, one or two did point to the possibility of problems. A HR consultant thought people might take undue advantage of the policies. She couldn't think of many actual examples, ‘maybe one or two at the most’, but she felt it could happen that ‘the arrangements end up swaying in favour of the person, so the business isn’t actually getting the best out of that person’. She went on to say that then became a management issue: ‘I really think the onus is on us to manage that in a way that we do get the best from that person, so that it’s not all one-sided’ (Interview two). Another interviewee also saw this as a problem. He felt that ‘this organisation needs to go in gentle moves because there’s also that fragment of employees out there that are leeches, suck everything they can get out of the organisation’ (Interview six).

This same interviewee introduced a cautionary note about how far to go in developing policies. He said there was always plenty of room for further development, but things could be taken too far and there was no point in being ‘ridiculous’ about it (Interview six).

A union representative injected a note of cynicism. She said that most of the family-friendly initiatives the union put up were accepted by the company, and then went on to comment: ‘I don’t want to be too cynical, but mostly they don’t really cost the company a lot of money or a lot of efficiency, and the staff appreciate them’ (Interview eight).
17 Balancing work and family

The family responsibilities of the participating male employees and their partners at company number two were similar to the first case study. All of the men worked full-time while their partners undertook home duties and child care either full-time or combined these with some paid employment. Specific comparison between the findings of the male employees' and partners' focus groups is more relevant in this case study as the women in the partners' focus group were the actual partners of the male employees in the study (see Appendix 1).

17.1 Male employees’ family responsibilities

**Male employees’ perspectives**

As in the first case study, the men did not claim earning an income as their major responsibility to the family, despite the importance of male breadwinning both in practice and as a justification for men's low take-up of family-friendly policies. Again, like the men in the first case study, participants in the male employees' focus group at company number two tended to see their responsibilities as very similar to those of their wives. One man even said he and his wife shared every responsibility equally, including bringing in the income: ‘We don’t have my jobs and her jobs...it’s pretty much uniform...in my situation it’s a full sharing’. Another said that this was probably the case in most situations where wives worked, either full-time or part-time: ‘It’s all about sharing responsibilities and doing what you can to help out’.

Another male employee saw his role largely in terms of giving his partner a break from child care. Because she was a full-time mum, she looked forward to having someone there at night to ‘take him off her hands for a while’.

Like the male employees at company number one, these men were also keen to have a significant role to play in their children’s lives and to be more involved with day-to-day family life. But they didn’t see how they could manage that, given the way the world of work was organised at the moment:

> In the ideal world, we'd probably both work part-time, but in my situation at the moment, it's going to be pretty tough to do that...It's certainly not the status quo...in the engineering industry to be working part-time. It's either perceived as the whole-hog or nothing.

Obviously, he said, when she’s breast-feeding, ‘I can’t help her there’.

---

147
Female partners’ perspectives

The issue of men providing financially for the family did come up in the partners’ focus group. When they were asked about their husbands’ responsibilities to the family, the first response was ‘a full-time wage’. But this was immediately qualified and the money issue relegated to a minor role: ‘But also, much more than that really, being a father to the children as well’.

One of the women agreed with the men that the responsibilities of husband and wife were at least similar, if not identical:

Apart from the fact that he’s not there at the times I am to do the things that I do, the responsibility’s the same. We both know what needs to be done, and whoever’s there to do it, does it.

The woman above who mentioned ‘a full-time wage’ and ‘being a father to the children’ felt that, for that reason, men had more responsibility to their families than women did. Not only did men have to earn the family’s living, they also had to make time to be with their children: ‘So in a way they have more responsibility, I suppose’.

The women all agreed on one important role for their husbands, that they undertake at least some of the child care. Time with Dad was often an important break both for the women themselves and for the children:

And also, when he comes home, you’ve just had enough with the kids. There’s that fresh recharge when they’re playing with Dad before tea or in the bath.

Apart from the relief it gave them, the women valued the time their partners spent with the children for its own sake. Some of them commented on the lengths the men went to in order to make that time available:

Because we’ve got little kids, [my husband] always makes a point of being home by five o’clock. He starts very early in the morning and works through to 5.00, and he usually brings work home in the evenings…and he often works on the weekend to justify getting home at five o’clock, so that he can spend an hour, hour and a half with the kids before they go to bed.

The women also recognised that there might sometimes be a price to pay in the interests of fostering a good father-child relationship. ‘I’m the disciplinarian’, one woman said. ‘Are you the disciplinarian?’ she asked the rest of the group. ‘Yes’, they chorused. ‘Dad’s the good-time guy and Mum’s the grouch’, she went on.

Some women felt the respective roles of mothers and fathers varied with the age of the children. One woman commented that ‘we probably know what to do more with the babies because we’re with them’. Another woman said she had found her husband had had more to do with the children as they got older.
He loves to take them to the sport. And I find that’s just such a relief. It means I haven’t got to get up at eight o’clock...He sees that as his way of providing, because he’s not there during the week.

Another woman agreed that her husband was better with the older children. ‘He’s not good with screaming babies at all’, she said. She also saw her husband’s time with the children in terms of giving her some relief from constant child care: ‘as the kids get older, he’s able to give me that bit of breathing time’.

A debate about who collected the children from school if they were sick illustrated some of the key themes in parental responsibility for child care, namely, who is responsible, who should be responsible, and whether or not there has been a shift in parental roles.

In the first instance, one of the women commented that she would undoubtedly be the one who was called if her child suddenly took sick. She felt this as something of a burden.

So if you were working full-time and one of the kids was sick at school, who would go? Would you get the grandparent, or would it be your job? Whenever I work, it doesn’t matter that [my husband] works and I work, I’ll always be the one that gets called.

Other women felt that this was not always the case, that this role was often shared and that it depended on what was most convenient at the time. One woman said:

We’ve worked it out that, the days I’m at work, he’ll be the one that’s contacted to come and get them. And if they’ve got excursions on the days I’m working, his is the contact number.

Another woman said that, in her experience as a teacher, who picked up the children could depend on which parent was closer and that ‘often the dad would come’.

However, the women weren’t sure if they wanted their husbands to be the ones responsible for dealing with children’s emergencies. As one woman put it:

Sometimes I think, do we take it upon ourselves, that we want to be the one to be called because we know the kid so well?

Another woman admitted that she would ‘actually be a bit put out if they didn’t call me’, while a third woman thought they wanted to be the ones on call because ‘it sounds motherly’. Hence, while most of the women wanted their partners to be more involved in the family, some also felt a bit ambivalent about it, that it might mean they would be seen as being less than whole-hearted as mothers.
17.2 Partners' family responsibilities

Male employees' perspectives

There was limited discussion in the male employees' focus group about their partners' family responsibilities. On the whole, the focus remained either on their own responsibilities or on how responsibilities within their families were combined, despite being asked explicitly about the responsibilities of their wives. The following responses were typical:

In the area where I work, we're very flexible with our starting hours...as long as you're in by nine o'clock. So on Fridays...I've got the opportunity to get up and get the kids ready for school, make our lunches, breakfast, make sure they're dressed, and take them off to school. It gives me an opportunity to see them in the morning.

In our household, in the morning it's a bit of a rush, with three young kids...it's really crunch time for us...I've got to get ready for work and she's got to get the kids ready for school. So she does the kids and I've got to get ready for work. In an ideal world, I'd like to share that round a bit because that's sort of a critical part in the morning. After work, we can share stuff round and things are fine. But in the morning the pressure's on to get everyone ready and out the door.

Yes, we share the dropping off of the kids...That allows me to...at least have five minutes in the car. It gives you a chance to have a bit of a chat about things. That means I get in here still at a reasonable hour. If there was a stronger expectation on you to be here at 7.30 [am], I wouldn't be able to do that.

The focus stayed with men's own claimed responsibilities, without really addressing the significant role their partners played, thus indicating that, in the men's own minds at least, they played an equal role in sharing family responsibilities.

Female partners' perspectives

In response to the question of how they would define their major responsibilities towards their families, the first answer the women gave was 'looking after the children'. They described a variety of responsibilities under this general category of ensuring the children's well-being:

Making sure they're healthy and happy and...the right values and discipline. A stable life.
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

Something to eat, somewhere to sleep [laughter] [“clean clothes”] and clean clothes.

They also mentioned taking their children to and from school and other activities, ‘because there’s nobody else home’, including helping to ‘organise their social lives’ by arranging for friends to come over after school. This often involved what one of the participants called (to the general agreement of the group) ‘a taxi driver role’. There were also less tangible responsibilities, for example, being ‘a psychologist for their problems’.

One of the women summed up a mother’s responsibilities thus: ‘I think the responsibility’s everything’. Another added, amid laughter and general agreement from the rest of the group, ‘We’re the chief executive officers of the family’. Thus, in contrast to the way the male employees described family responsibilities, as being equally shared, their partners’ understanding was that it was they, the wives and mothers, who carried the main burden of responsibility at home.

Because they’re at work for so many hours, they don’t have the time to do those things to keep the household running on an everyday basis. What we do at home, I suppose, is what they do at work. They keep the business going, whereas we keep the other business going, which is the family. Most of us probably haven’t got husbands that work part-time, we take on that full-time role because we are part-time paid workers and full-time mothers.

17.3 Combining work and family

Participants’ experiences

The pressures of combining full-time work with caring for young children was clearly evident in the comments of many participants. One man with young children observed that both he and his partner felt a tremendous amount of strain:

I’m in a situation at the moment where I’ve got two under three…and the mornings are to try and get the eldest one dressed while mum’s breastfeeding and try and get some brekkie arranged for him, and when my wife finishes breastfeeding, I’ll have some breakfast ready for her…Our household is quite traditional at the moment because of the fact that they are so young…there’s an enormous amount of washing, there’s hiccups with the toilet training…So at present, [my wife]’s feeling the pressure…One in five weeks, I’m also on 24 hours a day, and that’s not terribly handy. You can imagine, at bath times and feeding time and meal time and things like that, when I’ve got to respond to problems in the system, that’s like a lead balloon.
He added that he didn’t think that kind of pressure was always fully understood at work.

Combining work and family put pressure on all members of the family, the children as well. One male employee described their routine in detail. His wife worked at two part-time jobs, so they had ‘to get timing right’, he said:

I get home and she leaves, so we sort of see each other on the weekends...everybody's got to pitch in, otherwise things like that just don’t work...there’s a lot of dependence on the kids to actually pull their weight as well...it works provided everyone pulls their weight. If someone slackens off, well then, it makes it hard going.

The women also said they found it hard to combine work responsibilities and family responsibilities, although some of them simply gave up the struggle and withdrew from the paid workforce.

The biggest thing in a way is that I can’t go to work as well...[m y husband] helps as much as he can. He’s actually very good at helping. But the bottom line is that I can’t be in the workforce in any way at all without putting the children in crèche...[and] it’s not viable to do that...in terms of keeping the children going and so on, it would seem to me that it does require one partner to be at home full-time.

Those women who did continue work outside the home continued to juggle the competing demands. One woman said, ‘When they go to school, and you work, and the holidays come up...you really need one person that can take full holidays then’. Another described the double workload:

All the things that you normally do through the day when you’re home, on the days I go to work, it’s all still there waiting for me when I come home. It ends up being double the amount of work when you get home...I’d try to get everything done [beforehand], so that...it’d be finished when I got home. It’s just going all the time.

This is quite a different picture to the one described by the men in the male employees’ focus group. Clearly the burden was not shared equally between husband and wife. Yet the women felt guilty for taking time out for themselves, as well as feeling grateful for any help at all. At the same time they were aware that these feelings did not match the reality of the situation. As one woman expressed it:

It’s like a guilt thing, too, isn’t it? If you go and play sport, if you go and do something, then you feel guilty. If [her husband does some housework, she says], “Oh, thanks for putting a load of washing on!” And I think to myself later, “Why did I say ‘thanks’?” as if he was doing this fantastic favour.
The women knew that the family side of work and family balance was predominantly their responsibility and that, if there was any conflict between family and work, it was their own work that had to be put aside, not their husbands’. One woman said she tried to keep the two days a week when the children were in long day care for study. But, she continued:

Yesterday was supposed to be a study day and I spent the whole day running the kids around...And somehow, [my husband]'s work always takes precedence over mine. So you get to be the chauffeur and run the kids around and too bad about what you’re doing. It always takes second [place].

Thus for the women, negotiations around work and family often meant giving priority to family at the expense of their own interests. When family demands impinged on working time, it was hers which was sacrificed, not his.

**Men’s use of provisions to meet family needs**

Nonetheless, male employees did at times avail themselves of the company's flexibility to meet family needs:

On a couple of occasions, I’ve had to attend something at school in the mornings, and because my wife works—and her job’s no less important than my job...we basically work it out in terms of which has the least amount of impact on our work. So if [his wife]'s got something particularly important that she needs to do...that takes precedence over what I might have to do here.

It’s not hard to get away a bit earlier if need be.

We can bank our time, that’s part of the flexitime. If you know it’s going to happen, you could work late...or the next day. That’s what I normally do.

If I’ve got something to do that involves my family, I’ll go. I’ll go and do it, because to me it’s important (Male employees’ focus group).

Male employees wanted to be involved on the ‘family side’ of the work-family equation, and they did use the company’s flexibility for family events or to pick up children in emergencies. Some also changed their work hours to take children to school or care or drop them off. Similarly, the women indicated that they did rely on the support provided when their partners were able to step in and give them a break. But the women were invariably the main providers of child care in their families, even when they themselves were in paid employment.
The male employees and their families were concerned about work and family imbalance. Where there is pressure on male employees at work there is additional pressure on their families and, in particular, on their partners, to take on extra responsibilities. The men want to help. Why is it, then, that they don’t make more use of the family-friendly provisions at the company? This question is discussed in the next section.
18  Barriers to men’s take-up of family-friendly initiatives

18.1 Difficulties with implementation

One reason was that it was not always possible to implement the policies. For example, the company’s paternity leave provisions were much appreciated by the partners of the male employees. But one woman said her husband had arranged to take it when their last child was born, but that ‘they needed him desperately to come back, so he didn’t get paternity leave’, despite the fact that ‘I wanted the help at home’.

Another example concerned job-sharing arrangements. One interviewee said that it could be better utilised. He said:

> We don’t recruit to job-share, and I think that becomes one of our biggest barriers. We’ll say, “It’s there. If you want to do it, we’ll try and find someone who’s already within the organisation to do it”. We don’t go actively recruiting [saying] “This is a job-share position” or, “We would like this to be a job-share” or, “Here’s these hours [to] job-share with someone else” (Interview five).

An employee also said that ‘that’s one of the things we don’t do at all here’, although he thought job-sharing was ‘the greatest advantage’ for flexible work arrangements.

18.2 Culture

Sex roles

Informants at company number two had a great deal more to say about conventional sex role expectations than informants at company number one. An interesting range of views on the respective roles of men and women in the family occurred in the supervisors’ focus groups. The participants were asked to say why, in their opinion, there were differences in the ways men and women used flexible workplace provisions to care for their families. One participant said that, in his case, it was because his wife worked part-time. ‘She’s usually finished between one and three o’clock. So she can do that carer’s role’, he said.

‘But isn’t that part of it?’ another participant, a woman, said: ‘Why does your wife work part-time and you don’t?’

He said there were a number of reasons — ‘tax reasons’, the fact that there was not a full-time job for her — but that he imagined things would change if she did get a full-time job. ‘I might then look to be the one that finishes at three o’clock every day and
goes home’, he said, although he suspected that might not be acceptable to the company. He also said (not entirely seriously), ‘I daren’t say it’s probably my view that it’s her role either’. This statement was greeted with laughter, and the woman participant said, ‘That’s right’.

He went on to say that the other two men on his work team had the same family arrangements he did, in the sense that ‘they’re the full-time employee and their partners either don’t work or are part-time’. Like himself, they too had ‘someone else to do those sorts of things that they would normally be taking that family leave for’. He concluded by saying, ‘It’s just people’s personal circumstances that influence the leave that’s taken’.

The woman participant agreed with his analysis of the realities of the situation. She said she had one single parent in her work group who, of course, had to go and deal with crises with the children because there was not anyone else. She said there was also a married woman who worked part-time so she would have time to ferry the children around, and that she did not ‘want to extend her hours because that is the arrangement’ she and her husband had made. She also thought that these were patterns people fell into automatically without really thinking about them:

> You know, men mow the lawns and put the garbage out and women cook and do the washing. That’s what happens. I don’t think it’s anything deliberate. That’s just how it is.

Another participant was a little more optimistic. ‘I think we’re slowly moving beyond that, though’, he said. Someone else agreed, but said that it was still the case that the woman is seen ‘as the carer’ and ‘the one who’ll go and get the kids from school if they’re sick’. He went on:

> And a lot of women take jobs that are close to home or close to the school so that they are available to do that in the first place, whereas men usually...would go for a job they feel is the best fit, whether that's near home or not.

One man said that he would love to be able to stay at home. Someone else said, ‘You’d soon get bored, mate’, to which he replied, ‘Nup, no way’.

Another man said there was ‘no easy answer to why men work and a lot of women don’t’. He said women’s conventional role certainly had something to do with it, but there was also ‘a physical role that you can’t get around’, the fact that ‘the men don’t give birth, but the women do’, and that ‘the women have got to raise the kids, at least in their early months, until they can get off breastfeeding’. He also thought that:

> The roles can never be 50–50 because there are some women that don’t want to go back to work. And no matter what everyone else has said, there’s
a stronger bond there for mothers and kids. I think from day one, there has
to be because you’re actually feeding them and all that sort of stuff.

The woman brought the discussion back to the question of culture in the form of social
pressures. ‘It’s not quite as accepted, either’, she said, ‘for men to be the carer at
home while the woman is off working’. She said she personally didn’t know ‘of any
male who stays at home while the female is at work’.

This interchange contained a number of familiar themes around the differing roles of
the two sexes. (There was even a reference to nature as a force driving the caring
arrangements in families.) There was general agreement that the influence of these
roles was still strong. A couple of the men were convinced this could be changed if
circumstances were different, although this was greeted with scepticism by some of
others—‘You’d be bored, mate’. There was a recognition that the roles operated as
subtle (and not so subtle) forms of pressure on individuals. There was also a
recognition that the arrangements people enter into feel as though they ‘just happen’,
as though that’s just the way it is and no one did anything deliberately to bring it
about. At the same time, there was also a sense that people are just doing what they
want to do—men want to give priority to their jobs, women want to stay with their
children when they’re young.

A general manager also said that his wife had taken the major role in caring for their
children because that is what she wanted to do:

We were fortunate because she had a profession that she could operate
from home and control her own time. It would have been much more
difficult in my profession to achieve that. But whether her profession
suited her or not, I think she still would have spent a lot more time with
the children when they were younger, than I did (Interview seven).

A union representative couched the issue of sex roles in terms of what men and
women were like in themselves: ‘I think they [men] feel it’s quite hard for them to say,
“I want to put my family first”; whereas for women, it seems to be the opposite’
(Interview eight). A HR general manager also saw it in terms of men and women
themselves. She felt that:

One of the barriers we’ve got to get over...is that in general...women tend
to be more open about communicating family and personal issues and
problems...they talk about them, we get to know about them and we do
something about it...men tend not to want to talk about personal issues.
And because they’re a little bit more stoic about it and we don’t hear about
it, we can’t try and do something about it...I don’t know if it’s a macho
thing…but a lot of them don’t want you to help them and you have to
respect that.
It was clear that she did not see this as inevitable, since she was concerned that something needed to be done about it. ‘I don’t know how we do it’, she said, ‘but we’ve got to find a way to get [men] to open up’ (Interview 1). She did feel HR was already doing something by getting men to fill out ‘lifestyle inventory’ questionnaires, to participate in individual and group sessions discussing personal issues, and so on.

In the case of women, she felt they were more likely than men to take up flexible work options, not because the company was ‘more accepting of women taking up flexibility than men’, but because women were ‘the ones that come forward’. And women were the ones who came forward, she said, because they:

Are still the ones with prime care for the children, and it’s still seen within that family group, for whatever reasons, as acceptable for the women to have a job that gives flexibility to look after the children.

She, too, mentioned the pressures put on people by cultural expectations:

I think that’s just society in general. So therefore, [women] need to ask. They’ve got no choice, they have to come forward and ask for help, ask for flexibility…there’re definitely more women asking for it than men, without a doubt (Interview one).

**Man the breadwinner**

A key component of the cultural pressures on men was what this same HR general manager referred to as ‘a general attitude that men are the breadwinners’ (Interview 1). As in the case of sex roles, there was also more discussion at company number two than at company number one about men’s breadwinner role, probably because it is a major aspect of those roles.

A male employee felt it was men’s commitment to this idea that lay behind their reluctance to ask for time out for family responsibilities. He said it was ‘culturally not right’ for men to put their kids first ‘because you wear this image of being the breadwinner and you’re the principal salary person’.

A union representative agreed: ‘Men [say], “I have to go to work. I’m the breadwinner, I’ve got to earn the money”’. She too saw this as a cultural phenomenon: ‘It’s one of those things where you think, “Yes, it is culture, and it’s probably the way they’ve been brought up”’ (Interview four).

A supervisor thought the breadwinner role was normally so central to a man’s identity and sense of self-worth, that he would need a fairly high level of self-esteem to take on a part-time job in order to stay at home and look after the children. He attributed this to ‘an expectation in society’ which he thought was ‘probably getting smaller and smaller’ but which was still influential.
A non-union representative, when asked why men did not take family leave, said that things had not changed much from the 1950s, ‘when the dad went to work and the mum stayed home and looked after the kids’. He thought it was still probably true in most families that ‘the male is the predominant breadwinner, he’s out there making the big dollars’. He said that, until that attitude changed, men would continue to leave the child care to their wives instead of taking some responsibility for finding out what family-friendly provisions were available for them to use themselves (Interview six).

A general manager also did not think things had changed much, although he could think of a couple of examples that went against the norm:

I think men see their role in the family in a much more narrow way than women do...My guess is that a man in a very traditional sense probably sees himself as a primary breadwinner and his job is to work. If you're a young couple, I guess some time in the future you're probably planning to have children, and the wife's lifestyle is likely to change much more dramatically than the husband’s...There’s only been a couple of men in the company, that I can recall, who have taken an active parenting role. There's one chap, terrific guy, who came on board on the basis that he'd only work three days a week because he wanted to share the parenting with his wife, to a greater extent than the normal bloke does, I suppose. But that's pretty rare in my experience...the roles are still pretty well defined (Interview seven).

**Workplace culture**

There was less discussion of the workplace culture at company number two than at company number one, probably because company number two was not in a manufacturing industry and hence had less of the traditional ‘male as breadwinner-type culture’ typical of those industries. However, at least one male employee felt there were pressures in the workplace preventing men from admitting how important their children were to them:

My kids are a high priority for me, generally that's accepted. But we don’t often actually...come out and say, “Well, I can't come to this meeting because my kids are going to take my priority today”. I think we just assume that, organisationally, it's not right to say it.

**Guilt**

At company number two, these workplace pressures were sometimes experienced as guilt. This was an issue that informants at this company brought up a number of times (unlike company number one where it wasn't mentioned). Usually it was guilt about being seen as less than whole-hearted about work if priority was given to family. As one employee said:
There's a bit of guilt there...but you think "No, my family comes first, no, I've got to go and do this with them". So there is a bit of guilt because everyone's still here [at work].

He clearly saw this as part of the workplace culture, and that it needed to change:

I guess if we had to change something, it'd be looking at improving the culture a bit there, to say, ‘There’s no guilt attached [to] this. This is a family issue, go deal with it, you can work back late tomorrow’. You don’t need to carry that baggage.

A second employee said, ‘I feel guilty walking out of the office at four o’clock, regardless of what time I came in. I can't help it’. Another one said he did not have that guilt at walking out at 4.30 [pm] because he knew he'd be at work until 6.30 [pm] or 7.00 [pm] on other nights. The second employee said he still felt guilty, and he also worried about who might see him leaving early, about who might be ‘looking out the window’.

A HR consultant said that those staff members who used the company's family-friendly arrangements tended to be ‘more sensitive about it than their peers or colleagues are’. She did not mention guilt, but she did say that her perception was ‘that people who use these arrangements are sometimes very keen to make it known that they’re not abusing any kindness (for want of a better word) that’s been shown to them’ (Interview two).

One employee’s partner attributed at least some of the guilt to management behaviour. She said there was time when her husband’s leave entitlements had accrued from year to year—‘We were up to 13, 14 weeks’—despite the fact that company policy did not allow leave to be accumulated. Whenever he had said he was going to take his holidays, she said, ‘They do this huge blackmail-guilt thing, “It's not the right time”’. Another woman said, ‘There's never a right time’.

Another woman said her husband made a point of taking his four weeks leave every year. This was partly in response to some good advice he had received from ‘an older guy in [the company]’ who had warned him that he'd lose touch with his children if he did not take leave. She agreed, though, that the men did ‘feel guilty for taking it’.

A senior HR consultant admitted to feelings of guilt and discomfort even at the thought of working at home:

For me to turn around without [officially taking] any leave and say, “Look, I'm going to work from home today because I'm working on something strategic and I don't want interruptions” —No, I'm not personally comfortable with that...I've never done it...to me that's still guilt (Interview five).

Another employee talked about the guilt as a double burden. Not only did he feel guilty about work, about going home early to be with this family, he also felt guilty about going to work early in the morning and leaving his family. ‘There's times', he
said, when ‘I feel squeezed from both ends’. He said it was not ‘earth-shattering’ but, he went on:

   It is difficult. It’s certainly...on my mind, and comes to my consciousness almost every day in terms of trade-offs and making decisions, and the element of guilt (Interview nine).

Change
In general, the research participants felt that things were changing. One male employee thought there had ‘definitely’ been ‘a shift in the workloads’ in the family because both parents had to work. That was his situation, he said, and as a result ‘the bloke’s got to take on some responsibility, or more responsibility’. Others in the group agreed with him. Another man thought there was now ‘greater awareness’ in workplaces, too, in comparison to when he started his career.

A HR general manager saw that nowadays there was widespread pressure on firms to introduce flexible working arrangements for staff. She said that among the senior management group in this company, making use of family-friendly policies was the norm:

   If you’re not using flexibility to be a family man, then you’re on the outer more than the ones that do...Now, it’s quite the “in” thing to be a loving and caring dad amongst that senior group...It's acceptable for somebody to say, ‘I'm leaving at four o’clock because I need to pick up my kids, my wife's working late tonight” (Interview one).

A senior HR consultant suggested that one of the things driving the change towards fathers’ greater participation in family life might be men’s realisation that they could miss out completely on crucial aspects of their children’s lives:

   The realisation that all of a sudden your kids are leaving home and that maybe you didn’t have enough to do with them. I don’t know whether fathers are saying that more and more, “I wish I had've”, and that’s starting to sink in to people now (Interview five).

One man could map the change in his own attitudes. He used to ignore what happened in the family, he said, and still did at times: ‘as a male and having a family, I tend to sometimes do the old head-in-the-sand and don’t worry about what the family’s doing, and, “Yes, that’s your problem, darling”, and things like that’. He was now of the opinion that this was ‘a pretty awful’ attitude and he had ‘had to change my whole perspective about it’. He now took advantage of the company’s family-friendly provisions, and enjoyed using them (Interview six).
Role models
As in the case of company number one, informants at company number two also saw role models as one way of effecting change. When asked how people got to hear about flexible work arrangements when so much was a matter of private negotiation, a senior HR consultant saw role models as one way of making sure people knew about what was available (Interview five).

Informants were asked if they knew of any role models and some gave examples. The manager who only came into work four days a week (see section 15.3) was mentioned several times. A HR consultant gave another example of a man who did not have ‘any specific arrangement in terms of part-time or anything like that’, but who had ‘flexible working arrangements where he can come in late on a Friday when he drops his kids off at school’ (Interview two).

Again, as in the case of company number one, the point was made that role models needed to be senior people in the organisation. A male employee said, ‘A role model for me would be someone who uses [flexible work arrangements] but then is also successful in the business’. He said that someone who used those arrangements but failed to succeed would hardly count as a role model.

A HR general manager said women had asked her to take up some of the family-friendly options, saying, ‘If you do it, we can all do it’. Her reply was, ‘You can do it now’. But, she went on, ‘They want somebody senior to do some of these things, so it’s seen as being all right’. She said even some of the senior people were unsure that the company meant what it said when it encouraged people to take up family-friendly options. They wonder whether they’re going to miss out on promotion, whether it will mean they are seen ‘as a mum or a dad, rather than as a senior person’. She said HR were ‘still working to get over that hurdle’ (Interview one).

She went on to give examples of senior staff who had taken advantage of the company’s policies. She did say, however, that there was a problem with visibility. Because senior people ‘probably don’t go through the same formalities’ to take time out to be with their families, staff tended not to be aware of it. ‘They’re not aware’, she said, ‘that, say, 10 of the 60 senior people are leaving early because they have to do something with their kids’. She also said that not all employees would know about the managing director’s own history, nor about his support for family-friendly policies (Interview one).

Problems with role models
Role models are not the answer to everything, of course. Even where they exist, people have to be convinced of their relevance. A HR consultant said some people reacted by saying, ‘Oh, that’s a great arrangement, but my manager’ll never agree to it’. She said this had been the perception of the senior man with the four-day week arrangement. ‘His view was that people were very interested in how he had reached such an
arrangement’, she said, but they believed they themselves ‘could never be so fortunate’ (Interview two).

A senior HR consultant said sometimes the nature of the organisation meant that role models were not much use because employees couldn’t take advantage of flexible options anyway. He was not talking about the Call Centre here, but about those parts of the enterprise that had to deal with things that could go wrong at any time (‘Murphy’s law’), and customers who wanted problems fixed immediately.

He also said that people might not want their arrangements made public. Although there are role models in the company, he said, ‘we don’t put them on a soap box because, one, they don’t want to be and, two, we respect people’s privacy’.

He also pointed out that it was possible to have negative role models, senior staff who gave entirely the wrong message if the aim was to convey the idea that the company supported employees’ use of family-friendly provisions. He said he was ‘one of these silly people who has not taken a day’s sick leave in 10 years’ and that he prided himself on that. But somebody had recently pointed out to him that this gave the impression that he was some kind of ‘super-hero’ and that staff had ‘to be that way too’. While he had thought he was doing the right thing, by not taking any time off he was telling staff they couldn’t either (Interview five).

18.3 Career

One of the major barriers to men’s take-up of family-friendly provisions is the fear, whether real or imagined, that to do so will have a negative effect on their careers. As some of the men in the male employees group commented:

I can’t help thinking it would have an impact on your career progression.  
...If you would go to permanent part-time, you could almost say...

You’re not going anywhere else.

Yeah, my promotion opportunities are going to be restricted. Whether that’s right or wrong, I don’t know, but I just have a sense that that’d be the case.

A union representative said that had certainly been her experience. She was working a four-day week because she had a young baby, and she had found it was:

Just not possible for me to apply for promotions at the moment, because ...it wouldn’t even be considered that you could do [the higher level jobs] part-time or four days...So I guess I’ve had to accept that it’s just not worth applying for any promotion. I’ll stay at this level until I decide to come back full-time.
She said that, in her area, only two or three employees were working part-time:

We're all girls and we've all been doing it quite recently. I don't know of anyone that has applied for a position, but I've certainly spoken to my managers about positions that have come up, and said, "Is it worth me applying?" And they've said, "Well, not unless you get a job full-time. It's not a position that you can do part-time".

She gave the example of a senior manager who had asked to go part-time. He ‘was told that there wasn’t anything for him and he left the company. So that sends a message to everyone else then, and no one else asks for it’. She said she did not know what the answer was, but ‘it would help a lot if there were people, not even in senior positions, just team leader type jobs’. She also pointed out that this was another aspect of balancing work and family: ‘You’re balancing your work and family life day-to-day, but you’re also trying to balance the bigger picture of setting yourself up for the future’ (Interview eight).

A senior HR consultant thought it was not so much the arrangements themselves that impeded career progression, but being out of touch with what was happening at work. Being out of the office for any length of time meant missing out on things. Partly it was a matter of ‘competing for promotions or other positions against people that have learnt more’ because their job tenure has not been interrupted. Partly it was a matter of not being able to rotate to other areas of the company because the part-time or job-sharing arrangement is not available, and once again, failing to compete with those who had learnt more because they had been able to move between different positions. He said he took the view that the company was ‘a learning organisation’, and that anything less than full-time commitment to the workplace meant ‘less learning time, therefore’.

The employee who discussed his feelings of guilt about both family and work (see section 18.2) said he had ‘made a choice not to go for a promotion because I didn’t want to lose my freedom in terms of controlling my time, the flexibility’. He said taking ‘a higher management role’ would mean he could not get home ‘at a certain time each day’ in order to be with the children. At the same time, given he was restricting his hours of work in this way, he had greater expectations of what he wanted from a job. He was less likely to ‘put up with stuff if I’m getting bored with it because I don’t have that time’. So although he had given up thoughts of promotion for the time being, there were other compensations at work (even leaving aside his main motivation of spending more time with his family) (Interview nine).
18.4 Men’s earning capacity

Informants at company number two had less to say about the vital importance to households of a male wage than those at company number one. This was probably because the partners’ group at this company contained women who were in paid employment, whereas the partners’ group at company number one consisted of women who were out of the paid labour force. Nonetheless, those who did talk about men’s higher earning capacity saw it as one aspect of men’s low take-up of opportunities to care for their families. As one partner of a male employee put it:

It’s just sheer finances. My husband can earn twice as much as I can. I’m educated to the postgraduate level, but I simply cannot go out into the labour market and earn what he can.

Participants in the supervisors’ focus group agreed:

I think it’s a financial issue as well.

Yes, usually, in 75 per cent of the cases, the male earns more than the female for whatever reason. That’s the reason I work and my wife doesn’t, because I can earn more than she can. I’d be quite happy to go home if she could earn more than I can.

Another supervisor gave the counter example of a friend of his ‘who’s done the exact opposite. His wife can earn a lot more than he can and he does a lot more part-time work and fits in with the kids’ hours’. He said he had often thought it would be nice to be able to choose, and wondered what he’d do if he got the opportunity. But he had not, and in his view, ‘it all comes down to economics’.

Two of the women in the partners’ focus group identified one of the main reasons why husbands earned more than wives, that is, the wives’ time out of the paid workforce. One woman said that she could not earn as much as her husband did now, because she had made the decision to stay home 12 years ago when she had her first baby, ‘so now I haven’t got something to fall back on that pays a lot’. The other woman said she’d been out of the paid workforce for three years by this time. Two years ago she had turned down a promotion she’d been offered in order to lure her back to work. At the time, she and her husband had been earning similar amounts of money, but now, ‘the gap’s much bigger and it makes the decision for me to go back to work much harder’, especially as her husband had had two promotions in that time.

The group also talked about the reasons why women leave the paid workforce to stay at home to look after the children. One woman said that in her experience ‘a new-born baby is just too full-time’. Another woman mentioned ‘just the sheer physical exhaustion of a new-born baby’ and the fact that the housework is ‘all still waiting
when you get home’ from work. A third woman agreed. She said that, after her second
child was born, she had left the paid workforce altogether because she found it too
difficult ‘to combine children and crèche and working’.

18.5 Workload

As in the case of company number one, one overwhelmingly important reason why
fathers cannot take advantage of the family-friendly provisions on offer is the fact that
employees work long hours, more than the standard 38 hours a week, sometimes
much more. Frequently (again, as in the case of company number one) that overtime is
unpaid. When one of the male employees said, ‘There wouldn’t be too many people
who’d be at risk of not doing their minimum of 38 hours’, there was laughter and
general agreement. There was also general agreement when one man said:

I reckon there’d be very few of us that go close to testing the boundaries.
If we were to stick to the letter of the law and say, “38 hours a week” and
all that sort of stuff, most people would give far in excess of that.

Another man said he didn’t think the hours written into the basic contract were worked
by anyone in the group:

You’re probably working more than that, and you’re not being paid for it.
So you’d probably be working closer to 40 to 45, as an average. Some are
probably working a lot more than that.

He went on to say that, therefore, ‘taking time to go to a family event’ didn’t mean
working less than the standard working week.

The Union Representative agreed the workload was ‘a bit much’:

Workload? Well, it’s the same old [story]—they want to do more with less.
But every company does, so that’s not something new…Workload’s
always something that’s brought up when you have new negotiations for
a new EB[A].

She said the company did try ‘to improve things to reduce that workload for you as
well’, although she did not give any examples (Interview four).

The Non-union Employee Representative said:

You don’t work 38 hours. There’s no one that comes in and clocks on at
8.00 and knocks off at 4.30 every night and disappears and says, “That’s
38 hours”. There ain’t none of that any more. I would say a standard week
would be between 45 and 55 hours, and if not, a little bit more. That’s
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

between seven and 17 hours in excess of what you’re getting paid [for]
(Interview six).

It was the male employees’ partners who were most articulate about the long hours their husbands worked and the ways in which that impinged on family life. When asked what was the normal length of the working week, one woman said, ‘Seventy’, and another woman agreed with her. Another woman said that her husband ‘probably gets home at 7.00 at night and he gets to work at 7.00 [am]’. Others said that 10 hours a day was average. When asked whether or not it was a 38-hour week, the women chorused in unison: ‘No’.

They gave a number of examples of the excessive workloads their husbands carried and how they managed that:

[My husband]’s on the duty roster, so in one in five weeks, we have phones ringing at a quarter past three in the morning.

[The company] don’t understand how many hours are involved. If [my husband]’s bathing the baby and the phone rings, [that’s] a very big impact on the family.

Because we’ve got little kids, [my husband] always makes a point of being home by five o’clock. He starts very early in the morning and works through to 5.00 [pm], and he usually brings work home in the evenings and does an hour, hour and a half in the evenings. And he often works on the weekend to justify getting home at five o’clock, so that he can spend [time] with the kids before they go to bed...He works from 7.00 [am] to 5.00 [pm], doesn’t have a lunch break.

It was not only employees’ partners who criticised the workload. One member of the supervisors’ focus group referred to:

Guys working crazy hours and never getting paid for it...They don’t expect to be rewarded for it, they just do it.

Another supervisor said that he tried not to let work impinge on his family life. That did not mean not taking on extra work since he did it ‘when the kids are asleep and they have absolutely no idea’. Another member of the group, however, said he had ‘never, ever, taken work home to do it’ and that the other two men in his work group had not either. He said, ‘I might stay till six o’clock and get it done, but no way will I take it home’. Another supervisor said that none of the men in his work team took work home either, because they needed the computers at work to do it.
As well as the long hours of work, employees talked about what one man referred to as ‘unrealistic expectations that demand you be available all the time’. One employee said the office had rung him up while he was on holidays. Another one said:

That's what happens to me all the time. But I tolerate it because it’s the best way I can manage to deal with the customers. To brief someone else for a two-week period... is just so intensive, I can’t be bothered. I’d much rather take the phone with me and just answer it. It doesn’t take that much to do.

Others, however, did not think it was ‘the right answer for the company as well’. Nor, was it the right answer for families, as the first man pointed out:

Those sort of things need to be addressed so that you don’t have to make judgements about priorities to the detriment of your family. You should be able to strike the balance and we shouldn’t be placed in positions where we have to decide between the two.

A member of the partners’ focus group said that she would not allow the company to give her husband a computer at home because she knew it would overtake their lives, ‘like the mobile phone on holidays and the email that you’ve got to stop in Adelaide to reply to 200 of them’. (She said they eventually relented but her husband’s ‘not allowed to use it much’.) Another woman also mentioned the emails: ‘Aren’t they a devil?’ She said her husband is not even back at work from his holidays and he’s checking emails at home. Another woman, though, said she did not mind the computer at home, that it made ‘life a bit more flexible’ and allowed her husband to get home earlier to see the children.

A general manager believed that, to the extent that people did work long hours, it was only on special occasions. He said it sometimes happened that the area he managed had deadlines for the projects they were working on. At those times ‘they’ll put in three or four 12-hour days’, while at other times, ‘they might have some quieter periods... where they’ll make up that time’. He called this ‘a bit of peakiness in the way they work’. He said he had told his people not to burn anyone out, and he was aware that ‘you can’t sustain 12-hour days for long periods of time’. He said the company had, ‘in the past, tried to implement too many projects simultaneously’, and that ‘as a consequence, the effectiveness has gone right down’ (Interview three). This was the General Manager who made the point that driving people hard had adverse effects on productivity, what he called ‘the spinning wheel effect’ (see section 16.2).

A senior HR consultant also thought that pressures to work long hours were confined to particular times and particular areas. He pointed out that the company provided a vital service and had people depending on it all day every day. He went on to say:
If you’re in those roles, unfortunately it’s part and parcel of it, and you’ve got to look on the positives about the satisfaction you get from the other parts of it. It is draining on your family when you’re in those situations, when you seem to be entirely on call for work and customers and not for your family. I know my wife has questioned that a few times, but my kids have been really good with it. They say that what [the company] does is very important, and someone’s got to do it, and if you’re not doing it...well, who does it? It can’t just fall between the cracks. That’s...the difficult balancing act (Interview five).

He agreed the work could not be done in the standard workweek. ‘You can’t do it in 38 hours’, he said, ‘particularly not in positions at team leader and above’. He gave a number of reasons for that—the fact that the business was open for longer hours than it used to be, that staff needed to be accessible to customers, and that there was ‘less staff to delegate things to’ (Interview five).

Another general manager was unsure how much of a problem the workload was. In response to a question about how the company helped with family needs, he said:

> There is an issue for us about how long people work as well, the hours they put in. There is a sort of a feeling around the company that people spend too much time at work.

He thought the company was not ‘doing a lot about that’, but he also thought that ‘the majority of staff get to work a reasonable day, and I don’t think are highly stressed’. However, he then went on to admit he ‘might be wrong’ (Interview seven).

**Lunch breaks, leave, rostered days off, time-in-lieu**

The partners of the male employees also chorused ‘no’ when they were asked if employees had lunch breaks. ‘That’s another thing to go’, said one woman. Another said a lunch break was included in the EBA but employees rarely took it because of ‘meetings, meetings, meetings’.

Another woman said her husband did eat lunch but that he continued working while he was eating. ‘It’s expected of everyone’, she said, ‘whether you get $22 000 a year or...$60 000 a year. It’s an unofficial thing that tends to happen’. Someone else said it would not be so bad if it only happened occasionally, ‘if there’s a really bad time and you’ve got to pitch in’. But when it became the norm, she said, ‘I think that’s eroding family time’.

A general manager also said taking a lunch break was ‘very unusual’, and that he hadn’t done so for years. When asked if that had been the case before the 1995 restructuring, he said:
Oh, no. I can remember when I first started, everything used to stop at 10 o'clock, and the tea lady used to come around with this great big tea trolley and sell biscuits and tea and stuff. And we'd all stop and do the crossword. And you would definitely take your 48 minutes for lunch (or whatever was given us at that stage). That's the way the world was then (Interview 7).

The employees' partners also talked about the difficulties their husbands had in taking the leave they were entitled to. One woman said the company 'actually have a policy that you're not allowed to accumulate...leave'. She then went on to detail the accrued leave her husband had. She said her husband:

Hasn’t been able to take three lots of long service leave. He’s got nine weeks of annual leave...We were up to 13, 14 weeks. For years, we couldn’t have a month’s holiday because we had to be here for the end of the month or the start of the month, for years and years and years. I thought, “I’ve had enough”. So the last three years, we’ve been in the bad books because we’ve taken three weeks holiday.

There was also the example of the husband who could not take all his paternity leave because ‘they needed him desperately to come back’ (see section 18.1).

One member of the supervisors’ focus group said that planning annual leave in the area of the business he worked was very difficult, because the quarterly periods when all members of the work group had to be on-hand coincided with the school holidays:

The three males in the team all have a different role but they’re all [needed for] that process starting and being successful. There are three specialist roles. We [all] know what the other person does, but to do those two roles if you let one person be away for a fortnight, it wouldn’t work.

When he was asked how people took their annual leave, he said, ‘Personally, you do not. I’ve got about 70 or 80 days accrued’. When asked if it was the same for the employees he supervised he said, ‘A couple of them would have more than their standard leave banked up, yes’.

A general manager, told during his interview that people were having difficulty taking their annual leave, said:

I can’t imagine there’s any single position in the company [where] we can’t afford to let people go for a month. There isn’t a position. If the managing director takes time off, and the general managers take time off, who’s more important? Who’s got a more demanding, more difficult, more complex job that doesn’t allow them to take time off. It doesn’t make sense to me (Interview seven).
As well as lunch breaks and annual leave, there were also difficulties with rostered days off (RDO) and time-in-lieu. One member of the partners’ group said:

I know they’re on RDOs, but [they have to apply to take them] three months in advance...because of the workload...Sometimes the RDOs can just build up because they physically cannot use them, and yet they’ve worked out all those hours.

Another woman said, ‘Years ago, one section decided they’d do a time-in-lieu book ... It lasted a week and a half. People already had 20 hours’. When asked how time-in-lieu operated, she said, ‘They don’t have it now’.

One woman said that what she particularly resented was the attitude that ‘we should be very grateful’ for the leave, ‘whereas it’s an entitlement. You’ve worked [for] it, you’ve earned it, you should be allowed to have it’. Another woman agreed: ‘It’s their entitlements and they’re not being allowed’.

By contrast, another woman said that her husband had not had a problem with leave. He had just had a week off and had also been allowed to take another week next month. The other women responded by saying, ‘It must be a different area’.

When asked what they thought the company could do to make combining work and family responsibilities easier, the women mentioned the workload again. One said that ‘the expectation that they’re going to work those long hours [makes it] pretty hard’. Another said the company ought to ‘be realistic in how long and how much work hours are required to do what they want’.

**Explaining the workload**

**Personal inefficiency?**

One explanation given for the overlong hours worked blamed inefficiency on the part of individual employees. It was reported of the managing director that, when he saw staff working late, he said something along the lines of, ‘Get a life. What are you doing here? Are you so inefficient that you can’t finish on time and go home with your family?’ (Interview one).

A senior HR consultant also thought that at least some of the reasons for working long hours came from the fact that ‘people are not efficient in their use of time’. He said he prided himself on his time management. Rarely was he at work past 6.00 pm, and he could recall only once being there at 8.30 at night and that was because they were installing a new system. He felt that ‘some people that I see here late, get in late’.

At the same time, he also acknowledged there were pressures on staff not to leave before 5.00 pm, and that he himself felt uncomfortable with it (although he had to do it twice a week to go to lectures). He also said that, at least in the case of more senior people, they did have to be accessible when needed, and that might be at any hour of the day or night since the company provided a vital service. He also admitted to
‘getting in a little bit earlier’ and ‘maybe taking stuff and doing it at home’. And he admitted, ‘You can’t do it in 38 hours’ (Interview five).

A general manager also felt the overwork could be explained, at least partly, in terms of people’s inefficiency, although he also thought there were ‘all sorts of reasons why someone might be overworked’. Sometimes it might be ‘because they just love to work’ and ‘prefer to be at work than at home’. He commented that this was ‘a bit sad’. He said other people ‘probably are overworked’ because ‘the distribution of workload isn’t always as even as it ought to be’. Sometimes it was the individual’s responsibility to do something about the overwork.

It might be that they can’t say “no”. It might be that they’re not good at prioritising their work. It might be that they’re not good at engaging with their boss about their workload, and saying, “Hey, hang on, you’ve just given me three extra things here and I’ve still got seven over here. Can we do a deal? Can we talk about our priorities?”

At other times it was the responsibility of the firm, a responsibility he felt was not always recognised by individual members of the executive. He thought the management team ‘certainly have a responsibility to ensure that people are not overloaded and stressed out, because they’re not going to be productive and happy if that’s the case’. But, he went on to say, although management talked a lot about the workload, ‘we don’t actually do much about it at the executive level, to be honest’. He also said it was ‘a bit of a worry’ when some executives responded to concerns about the workload with statements like the following:

“...if they worked out my hourly rate they’d probably find out that they were getting paid more than me”. So what does that say? [That] some members of the executive think they’re working much harder than anybody else anyway, so what’s the problem?

On the whole, however, he tended to think it was up to the individual. He said, I know myself, if my workload gets up, then the first thing I do is start questioning my delegation and priorities. I’m very, very rarely stressed about workload. I think it should be manageable (Interview seven).

**Understaffing**

In contrast, all the male employees’ partners explained the heavy workload in terms of understaffing:

There’s a lack of employees to get the work done. There shouldn’t be so much work. [My husband] says they’ll never get on top of whatever they're doing, never. (This statement met with general agreement).
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

Why should they have to do 10 hours work here and then do more work just so they can get home early? There should be enough employees.

I think it’s just lack of staff that creates the hours they’re working. It’s the volume of work, the amount of people they’ve got on, and they just can’t get through it.

Some of the women suggested that this was deliberate policy on the company’s part.

The same woman said

So what do [the company] do? They downsize and they get agency people and they cut and they cut. [My husband has said], “if we’ve got agency people, why can’t we have these people back as full-time employees”?

The Union Representative agreed:

Often people leave or are moved and they’re not replaced. But it’s bad form to complain about that. You’re just expected to take on that extra workload. People don’t like to say they can’t cope (Interview eight).

Another woman felt that the policy was self-defeating. ‘When there’s problems with the contract people’, she said, ‘then that’s even more time than if it was their own people’. But someone else said that there were financial advantages to the company, ‘because to actually employ people is a lot more expensive’. Another woman said, ‘It has happened that people who’ve left [after downsizing] have come back as agency workers. Because they know the work, they don’t have to retrain them’.

Two women gave details of the ‘downsizing’:

Years ago they decided they were really, really short-staffed…[Employees] had no choice…they all had to work through long hours. The mums who worked there really suffered…But from that, that continued on then. No one went back to having a lunch break.

When [my husband] originally started on…the [current 24-hour] duty roster, there were seven people, and a couple of people left, so it was down to five. [This] meant…he was on one [week] in [every] four weeks, which is just ridiculous. It would have been a little bit more expensive to get two more people because they have to put the computer line in…But the impact on the family would have been minimised so much more that that would have been better for the company as well as for the family. That would be something really simple they could do for the other people who were on duty.
One woman said, 'It's not just here. It's everywhere now, too', and met with general agreement. She went on, 'We've been here six months, and where he was previously it was actually a lot worse. It's just the way the workforce is going. I don't think it's the right way to go, but what can you do about it?'

The Senior HR Consultant who believed that the required work couldn't be done in 38 hours a week, concurred. 'Over time', he said, 'we've become a very lean organisation':

We have the lowest employee-to-customer ratio of any utility in the world, 650 000 customers, 370 employees...Over time, something's had to give—people have had to take on more, there're more requirements. I would say that, in that downsizing, we've taken on more things as a company as well. We never used to have [certain] services, [there's] far more regulatory involvement, we take more calls in the Contact Centre than we did 10 years ago. So it is difficult to do things in the spread of hours (Interview five).

A general manager also saw the problem of workload in terms of the downsizing of the company:

We're a relatively small company [now] compared to where we've come from in our history. And one of the consequences of that is that you tend to have…areas of expertise…concentrated on one person. There's one person who's very strongly on my mind. Because of his particular expertise, he gets pulled from all sorts of directions in the company, demands on his time and input. And he's got his own workload apart from trying to service a lot of other needs in the company.

He, too, saw the problem as wider than this particular company:

My views about that is that Australia has gone through some dramatic change...the Keating and Hawke years with the micro-economic reform, and all the pressure on Australians to become internationally competitive, and the dropping of the tariffs. I think Australia works harder than most western countries now. There's a fair bit of OECD evidence that supports [that]—we work long hours and take less holidays, and all that sort of terrible stuff...I think our pendulum's swung too far [in] one direction. I think it needs to come back a little bit. We do work too hard and too long. People would be surprised that a company like [this one] works as hard as it does. A lot of our customers think we're privately owned. But those that know that we're not, would be surprised...[at] the amount of effort people put in here (Interview seven).
He gave the example of his secretary who ‘comes in at about a quarter to eight and she goes home at about seven o’clock at night. She’s not well paid. Why does she do that? And she doesn’t take a lunch break’ (Interview seven).

A number of partners of male employees commented:

No husband is working those hours because they truly, really, really love their job.

Or really, really hate their own home.

They come home and they say, "We just need another person". And that’s basically what it is.

If [the company] were realistic in their staffing.

Yeah. If [employees] knew they could leave at 5.00 [pm]...[My husband] has said, after we got back from Christmas holidays, "I’m going to make the point that I’m out the door at 5.00 [pm]".

The company just wants what they can out of [the employees]. In the long term they burn out and they leave...and [then there is] the cost of re-employment and re-training. Across the board, I don’t think managers appreciate the value of the employees enough, not keeping them happy as such, but just appreciating them a little and letting them know they are appreciated...Because they are doing more work than what’s technically required. What would happen if everybody in the building clocked in at 8.00 [am], clocked out at 4.27 [pm] or whatever it is?

When asked if they could think of any way in which the company could be more helpful, the women said, ‘More staff’.

Although the male employees had a great deal to say about the workload, they did not attribute it to deliberate understaffing, or at least not directly. However, the man who talked about ‘guilt-driven flexibility’ clearly implied that the company had a major responsibility (‘guilt’) here.

A discussion in the supervisors’ focus group also implicitly attributed overwork to too few staff to do the job. One man said that one of the reasons people didn’t take leave was that ‘They know that if they go, there’s no one to take their job, and when they come back, the same pile is still sitting there’.

When asked what they thought the company could do to improve work-family balance, the supervisor who talked about the difficulties his particular area had in arranging
their annual leaves to coincide with the school holidays, asked jokingly if there was any chance of changing those arrangements which caused the pressures at those times of the year. ‘There probably needs to be some emphasis put on resources…to give you more flexibility so you can go on leave’, he said. Another supervisor said: ‘More heads, more heads’. Someone else said, ‘Don’t laugh it off. It’s a serious suggestion’. The first man said, ‘You’re right. It’s not only me’, and listed other areas of the business with the same problem.
19  Conclusions from the case studies

19.1  Family-friendly provisions and how men are using them

Both these companies have made every effort to be family-friendly, devising policies, educating management, informing staff, introducing the necessary cultural change and encouraging people to take up the options available. And yet they have had little success in persuading staff, at least in the case of their male employees, to take advantage of the flexible work conditions on offer. There is little use made by men of provisions which might be compatible with shared parenting, such as job-sharing and permanent part-time work. Instead, the men fashion one-off solutions by making use of family leave entitlements, flexible start and finish times and occasional telecommuting. Often this takes the form of informal arrangements negotiated and implemented at the most local level.

This remarkably similar result in both cases belies the differences between the companies. One is an almost classic model of a manufacturing industry, the other provides a vital public service. Each operates in a very different business environment, one the local branch of a global company subject to all the vagaries of a consumer market and the demand for commercial returns, the other imposing business disciplines upon itself in the belief that this increases efficiency and the quality of service. Moreover, there is an obvious contrast in the way each company has sought to develop and implement family-friendly policies. Company number one has placed the emphasis on the development of formal policies, while Company number two has made something of a policy out of not having a formal set of provisions and entitlements, while at the same time heavily supporting implementation on the ground. However, in practice, there is little difference between the companies (and most other Australian companies) in the actual implementation of policies. The reasons such divergent settings can produce such similar outcomes can be found, ultimately, in the reasons for the limited use male employees make of the entitlements available to them.

19.2  Identifying what constrains men’s take-up of these provisions

The influences constraining men’s take-up might be classified into four groups. First, there is the broad environment in which the company operates. Second, there are the contingencies inherent in the workplace, including the way work is arranged, the
resources available and the culture of the organisation. Third, there is the employee’s place in the interaction of work and family. Finally, there are issues of personal identity. Although these four classes of influence are analytically separable, in practice they are interwoven and interdependent.

**Business environment**

Both organisations have been subject to significant change. Company number one is concerned about maintaining local market share. There have been significant job cuts in the recent past. There is uncertainty about the future of local manufacturing operations and much is dependent on the success of a new product. Resources are very tight. There is a tangible sense of insecurity for employees.

Company number two has been transformed from an entity operating outside the market to one operating as though they were subject to competitive pressures and the profit imperative. Accompanying this move there have been reductions in staffing levels to the extent that workloads have increased and career progression has become dependent on demonstrated dedication through meeting performance indicators often requiring hours of work longer, sometimes much longer, than the standard negotiated for the EBA.

**The workplace—long hours, limited resources, local solutions**

Against a background of perceived insecurity, both workplaces have developed a culture of long hours of work. This actively discourages the use of special forms of leave designed to make it easier to balance work and family. Company number one, in an industry often plagued by absenteeism, still rewards employees who make no use of leave. This stance is seen by the male employees who participated in the research as diametrically opposed to the company’s stated wish to be flexible.

**Workload and hours of work**

Heavy workloads leading to long hours of work tip any balance between work and family heavily in favour of work and against families. As such, they are among the central causes of work and life imbalance for male employees. Measuring workplace performance through outcomes rather than through set hours of attendance has the potential to increase flexibility tremendously, since the specifics of how and when the work gets done do not matter as long as key objectives are met on time. This is particularly the case with men who are reluctant at this point to take up options for working part-time, whether because they and their families need the income of a full-time job, or because of concerns about career advancement. But if objectives are not carefully monitored and employees are asked to do too much, flexibility in the sense of having enough time apart from work to spend with family diminishes to vanishing
point. What has become clearly evident in this research is that both these workplaces are characterised by high workloads and long hours of work.

Ironically, this is particularly the case amongst those employees whose work has the greatest potential for flexibility, senior professional and managerial staff. While workplace norms are changing to give higher level staff more responsibility and control over their own work performance, those norms are also changing to increase workloads to the point where work threatens to take over more and more of life.

While there is obviously an upper limit to this process—there are, after all, only 24 hours in a day—from the evidence presented by the participants in this research, workplace demands too often go beyond the limits of what is compatible with family life.

This question of workload was not emphasised in the literature reviewed in the first part of this report. Although it was sometimes mentioned briefly, it was not given the importance it came to assume in reports of the work experience of the participants in this research. And yet, neither formal policies, no matter how exemplary, nor informal arrangements, no matter how adaptable to meet a range of individual needs, are useful if excessive workloads mean fathers do not have enough time to take advantage of them.

The workloads discussed by many of the informants are not confined to these two companies. If recent research is any guide, overlong working days have become increasingly common in Australian workplaces. On the basis of ABS data, Pocock (2000) showed, for example, that the length of the average working day for full-time workers grew 1.6 hours between 1989 and 1999, and that a quarter of full-time workers were now working more than 49 hours a week (Pocock 2000, p. 98).

Using four ABS time-use surveys conducted in 1974, 1987, 1992 and 1997, Bittman and Rice (2002) showed that, among employed prime working-age men (25 to 54 years), both the average length of the working day and work at unsociable times of the day had increased over those decades.

Employees interviewed as part of the Fifty Families study (Pocock et al 2001), gave various explanations for this ‘long hours culture’. Some interviewees said they worked long hours because they loved their jobs and because they were committed to their clients, whether students, patients or the general public. Others, however, felt they had no choice, that they were ‘doing extra hours out of fear’, fear of losing their jobs, fear of not being promoted, fear of being sidelined into dead end or undesirable areas, of not being permitted to work in their chosen fields. They talked about the pressures applied to persuade them into working longer hours, varying from outright requests, through having to deal with ‘emergencies’ (despite being a normal part of the operation of the organisation they worked for, e.g. ambulance services), to expectations which are never spelled out but which are understood by everybody. Pocock et al coined the seemingly contradictory phrase ‘compulsory voluntary work’ to
Conclusions from the case studies

refer to these pressures. This is work that is compulsory in the sense that there are negative sanctions for non-compliance, but ‘voluntary’ in the sense that it is unpaid. Like the participants in this current research, interviewees also attributed the overwork to understaffing: ‘There just aren’t enough people here to do the job anymore’.

The male employees in this study had the sense that they could not complete their tasks in the 38 hours per week for which they were paid. They felt (and some of their supervisors presumed) that they could not take time-in-lieu or rostered days off when the work was piling up and continued to do so. There was a feeling that crises at work were commonplace, that employees never got on top of the work no matter how hard they tried. All this fuelled the sense that, to be good providers, they could not disrupt the flow of their work, and that family must be fitted in around these workplace demands.

Resources to support policies

The issue of company resources to support the implementation of family-friendly policies regularly came up during the fieldwork at company number one. Senior management, supervisors, employees and the union all had differing opinions about the resources required. At one extreme were senior executives who praised the provision for being cheap to implement. After all, a job-sharing arrangement involved the company in little extra expenditure. At the other extreme were unions, employees, partners and some supervisors who argued that, in order for these policies to be thoroughly implemented, a large budget would be required to cover the extra staff in order to maintain normal levels of output. Our research suggests that staffing levels and workloads have a significant impact on work-family balance. While the senior executives are correct in suggesting that, in the narrow sense, family-friendly provisions are cheap, the effectiveness of these provisions turns on resourcing adequate levels of staffing. This obviously would require significant outlay.

Policy implementation and diffusion of information — supervisors’ discretion

Supervisory discretion has the potential to be a supportive mechanism, and in the case of the supervisors in this research there were clearly many trying to actively manage their staff with due regard for their family responsibilities. Because the main way in which men use the company’s provisions to balance work and family responsibilities is through informal negotiations with their supervisors (primarily for one-off situations such as the presentation day scenario used in the focus groups), then the role of their immediate supervisors is crucial. This is not only in the implementation of policy, but also in disseminating information and developing a workplace culture within their work area that is supportive of flexibility. Whilst some were happy to do this, others saw family-friendly provisions as a problem for them and as bad for the company. Hence discretion can be either inhibiting or enabling. The research suggests that the training of supervisors should be a policy priority.
Men, work and family

The pattern of men's use of family-friendly provisions is informative. It provides some indication of the relative family responsibilities male employees and their partners assume in their households. Most men interviewed wanted to be good fathers but, on the whole, they didn't take much responsibility for parenting. None of the men in this study were the main providers of care, nor were any sharing family responsibilities 50–50 with their partners. On the other hand, they were all working hard to be the providers (breadwinners) for their families.

However, what is striking is that none of the male employees (or their partners) defined 'fatherhood' in terms of breadwinning. Men talked about family in the way Anthony Giddens (1992) has suggested is characteristic of contemporary families, that is, as 'pure relationship' rather than in terms of roles defined by tradition. Men want to have a relationship with their children. They hope to communicate more deeply with them than their own fathers did. Most fathers adopt a child-centred definition of relationship, and place the emphasis on being present in situations the child defines as meaningful and important. They allow the child to determine family leisure activities, neglecting their adult hobbies in favour of the activities that really excite their child. It is difficult to tell how much of this talk about fathering reflects a genuine desire for greater involvement in parenting, and how much is lip service to contemporary notions of the 'happy family'. Support for both interpretations can be found in what the various participants said.

In practice, few men were involved in 'the daily grind' of washing nappies, making school lunches, tidying up and so on. Men's capacity to develop 'nice' relationships was usually dependent upon their partners' doing the other less pleasant tasks, like being 'the disciplinarian', or getting dinner so he could play with the kids. Often the family responsibilities men were prepared to accept were relatively limited. Certainly, most men saw their parental role as an auxiliary to their wives—giving their partners a break.

Nevertheless, the men said repeatedly they wanted to be more involved in their families. This commitment to parenting is one of the new forces behind the rising interest in men's (as opposed to women's) work and balance issues. Male employees become aware of work and family balance when their desire to be significantly involved in their children's lives clashes with the ongoing heavy demands of work. These men regularly become conscious that work pressures prevent them from 'being there for them when they need me'.

The other side of this coin is men's commitment to work and the demands that their work places upon them. While there has been some increase in formal flexibility in the organisation of work, informally most men experience increasing pressure to work longer hours. The significance of work hours in shaping the use men make of family-friendly provisions is one of the unexpected findings to emerge out of this research.
Cultural norms regarding appropriate roles for each sex remain a feature in decisions about family responsibilities and who should carry them out, whether by default (he is in the paid workforce because he earns the most and they have a mortgage) or by design (some male employees felt they themselves could not be the main carer). Many of the partners also said they wanted the level of involvement that they had in their children's lives. Men's unspoken assumption of the provider role also explains their reluctance to make use of flexibility provisions that reduce overall work hours (and therefore income). Maintaining a steady income for the household, especially meeting mortgage commitments, becomes the first priority.

**Male employees' motivations to take up provisions**

The evidence gathered in this research suggests that men lack strong personal motivation to put fatherhood, in the sense of 'being there', ahead of their work. The easy assumption of the role of family provider shows that men still derive significant elements of their identity as men from their ability to earn income. Overseas experience, as we have seen in the literature review, suggests that incentives for men to participate actively in parenting can be designed. Ultimately, these may change the way men not only think but also act as fathers. There is, however, no incentive for individual employers to introduce such schemes. They would need to be financed on some social insurance basis.

### 19.3 Policy implications

Policies encouraging men to increase their take-up of family-friendly provisions need to take the recognised barriers into account. If it is the case that men's reluctance is due to concerns about money and career, to certain meanings and values around masculinity, to heavy workloads, and to women's need and desire to care for children themselves, then policies need to address those issues.

Carlsen found, for example, from studying the outcome of 'family-friendly' entitlements for fathers in Denmark (1995, pp. 57–60), that the two biggest obstacles to fathers' increased participation in parenting were 'the financial aspect' and the fact that mothers generally wanted to take all the leave themselves (Carlsen 1993, p. 88). He suggested that flexible periods of leave, divided into shorter blocks of time or taken as part-time work, might assist with the financial barriers to fathers' uptake of parental entitlements (1995) (although the Norwegian experience with the Time Account scheme makes this option look less than hopeful—see section 3.3). A system of differentiated compensation, whereby payment was higher during the periods reserved for each parent and lower otherwise, could also be instituted to encourage fathers to use leave entitlements (Carlsen 1995).

To encourage men to share more equally in raising children, parental leave needed to be a personal entitlement of the father, in his view, and not dependent on whether or
not the mother was in paid employment and herself entitled to leave. He was not entirely sure whether quotas were useful (1993, p. 89), but he did recommend at least one month of paternity leave at the time of the birth, and six months of parental/child care leave after the child is six months old (Carlsen 1995). He also said that information about men’s access to leave needed to be widely disseminated, and networks for fathers on parental leave established to counteract isolation.

Following Levine and Pittinsky (1997), the Work and Family Unit (WFU), DEWR (1998, p. 3), has also made suggestions for creating a father-friendly workplace, the single most important of which, in the authors’ view, is flexibility of working hours. The authors also outline a number of strategies firms can implement, including communicating the message that family-friendly policies are not ‘for women only’ and not just for men in senior positions, ensuring that support for family-friendly measures comes from the highest levels of management, focusing on work performance not on number of hours worked, providing opportunities for men to consult with each other and share experiences, disseminating information about company policies through a variety of media, and supporting fathers who need to stay home with a sick child. They recommend that firms introduce paid paternity leave (a recommendation which is not needed in most European countries since they already have paid paternity/maternity leave entitlements at the national level—see section 3.1). They conclude by warning against ‘romanticising’ working fathers, pointing out that in the long term, all parents should benefit from family-friendly policies.

In the interests of helping firms implement strategies such as these, the ‘Men at Work’ program was funded by FaCS along with a range of other programs under the Men and Family Relationships Pilot program. The program aims to provide services specifically targeted at men, and to develop policies in consultation with staff and to introduce creative work practices based on men’s needs both at work and at home while increasing staff commitment and productivity (Work and Family 2001, p. 13).

However, according to the findings of the empirical research component of this study, at least one of these recommendations of the WFU—that employers focus on work performance rather than number of hours worked—could be counter-productive. At both the companies investigated, one of the chief barriers to men’s use of family-friendly provisions was the heavy workload (sections 12.7 and 18.5); and one of the key factors driving the increasing workloads in these firms, especially in the case of Company number two, was the organisation of work in terms of goals to be achieved rather than fixed hours of attendance (section 15.5). Of course, the real culprit was understaffing—as the male employees and their partners at both companies said over and over again, what was needed to reduce excessive workloads was ‘more heads’. Hence, an outcomes-based workplace is more family-friendly than one based on fixed hours of work, only if staffing levels are adequate.

Overall, these barriers can be divided into two broad classes—those that are within the ambit of company control, and those that lie beyond the company.
Conclusions from the case studies

For companies

Both companies included in this present study are already taking steps to deal with the issues discussed below (with the exception of the workload). However, the problems still exist and more work is needed if they are to be overcome.

In both companies researched for this present study, family-friendly provisions were available only to part of the company’s workforce. They were much more likely to be available to salaried, professional employees whose performance is measured by outcomes rather than by set hours of work. Each company has significant proportions of its workforce to whom these conditions do not apply, either because the rigors of the production line, or the relentless demands of the Call Centre, permit less flexibility. Both companies are aware of these inequalities of access. Company number one views itself as being at the beginning of a process of transition to achieve universal coverage, and company number two believes it has developed further than most in spreading these conditions throughout its workforce.

A finding from both the case studies is that there is a tension between setting down family-friendly provisions in policy (as at company number one), and providing them on a case-by-case basis (as at company number two and to lesser extent company number one). Having a formal policy promotes uniformity of treatment and, therefore, settles many of the issues around entitlement and equity. While the management at both companies tended to prefer the case-by-case administration because it maximised flexibility, this ad hoc system militated against clearly understood, uniform standards of eligibility and implementation. Some formalisation of policy does seem to be an aid in the process of disseminating entitlements, and increasing and promoting take-up of family friendly provisions.

Whatever the specific provisions in either company, there are a number of lessons to be derived from studying the process of implementation. The support of senior management is vital. While most senior management endorsed the idea of accepting responsibility for creating the conditions that make it possible to combine work and family, some senior managers still needed to accept the idea that taking time out to parent does not mean that men are ‘not serious’ about their careers. These latter views are more consistent with the traditional view of men as breadwinners. Family-friendly provisions assume that fathers should be more able to get involved as parents without jeopardising their careers.

At the level of workplace practices it is important that the immediate supervisors have a good knowledge of company provisions and how and when to implement them. There is scope for greater special training for supervisors. Thought might be given to developing such training programs. Company number two is working towards a model of this kind of training, devoting some of the work-time of middle management to training in work-family issues.
Employees are often poorly informed and unnecessarily wary of using existing provisions. Both supervisors and employees seem to rely on one-off solutions to short-term needs, with little thought given to planning for the regular and continuing demands of modern fatherhood. Previous research indicated that mothers are usually highly aware of their responsibilities to their family and plan their work around them. In contrast, most men still plan family time around the demands of work time. The companies could give some thought to how they might encourage greater awareness of company provisions and work schedule planning for parental responsibilities among male employees.

All these changes might be described as removing from the workplace tacit rewards for traditional model of a father-headed single income family household. This is a necessary step in converting family-friendly provisions into a gender-neutral set of conditions available to help parents balance their work and family lives.

In both companies a major barrier to men’s take-up of provisions is long hours of work. Modern management practice is to devolve the responsibility for tasks and budget to the lowest possible units. For many white-collar, professional employees, this means meeting outcome objectives, with the company less interested in the detail of how this is done, so long it stays within allocated resources. Employees commented that the greatest difficulties arose when an extra task was simply assigned to an already overcrowded work program. This hands-off style of micro-management can lead to neglecting to monitor the feasibility of work objectives and time frames. Shifting the emphasis from fixed starting and ending times to devolved responsibility for outcomes is inherently more flexible, especially in the ways that the men in this study are likely to use. However, this flexibility can become irrelevant to work-family balance when expected outcomes cannot be achieved in something approximating standard hours.

The research revealed a paucity of relevant information for monitoring both leave and workloads, particularly at company number one. In this company, it is not possible to distinguish sick from family leave in the system of personnel records. This data would be useful in the context of on-going support and evaluation of the company’s work-family performance. In devising an appropriate record-keeping system, it is important to give some consideration to the problem of stigmatising family leave. Some focus group participants suggested that well publicised, widespread use of family leave was likely to change the organisational culture and help to de-stigmatise family leave.

Monitoring would also permit companies to assess the strength of the business case for family-friendly provisions. A change in criteria for selecting winners of the ACCI Corporate Work and Family Awards might steer companies towards a more evidence-based policy.

Greater use of job-sharing possibilities was welcomed by all parties, management, unions and employees, as a way both of increasing flexibility and of maintaining labour levels so that work (and therefore additional pressure) didn’t fall to other
employees. More attention could be given to promoting more job-sharing arrangements, especially those compatible with contemporary norms of shared parenting and the new awareness of the need for fathers’ involvement in parenting. The research indicates that, to promote greater use of job-sharing arrangements, households will need to find ways of replacing the income (and promotion prospects) that fathers forego, perhaps through the improved earnings of women.

**Opportunities for policy makers**
A significant number of the most severe barriers lie outside the company’s immediate sphere of control. Public policy could play a significant role in reducing these barriers. Governments have a role to play in a number of areas.

Government has the opportunity to encourage men to become more involved in parenting when their children are very young, by establishing entitlements to paid paternity leave. Paid paternity leave avoids the problem of men having to choose between breadwinning and parental involvement. Bonding with a young child in the first year of its life is likely to have lasting effects on a father’s relationship with his child. This could lead to far more profound changes than could be expected by providing some flexibility in start and finish times, access to a telephone, etc. It would also have the benefit of supporting different forms of masculine identity, rather than passively allowing a system designed for the single breadwinner family household to continue unmodified. Adopting paid paternity leave is never likely to be in the interests of any single company, and could only be financed on a social insurance basis and administered federally. Norway and other Scandinavian countries have shown that policy instruments encourage men to share more in parenting.

Another key role for government is in the regulation of working-time. This has been an important venue of policy activity in Europe with a lot of interest being shown in the French system of capping weekly hours of work, and in the Dutch experiments in having large proportions of both men and women working part-time. Once again, individual companies appear to have little opportunity to regulate the working hours of their employees while their competitors are free to operate with small numbers of staff, working long hours, much of it unpaid overtime. Probably only by central government changing the rules of the game is there much hope of reducing the impact of growing hours of work on the work-family balance.

Both these areas offer significant opportunities for policymakers to facilitate men fulfilling their ambitions to be good fathers. By increasing men’s awareness and utilisation of company provisions, policymakers would be expanding the choices open to Australian family households, and increasing the ease with which they might combine their work and their family responsibilities.
Appendix 1: The research participants

Company number one

At company number one, there were three focus groups—with male employees at the company, with the partners of male employees, and with supervisors—and five interviews—four with Human Resources (HR) managers and one with a union representative.

The focus groups

The male employees’ focus group

There were 10 participants, all salaried workers and all working full-time. One of the participants had one child, eight had two children (two of these had new babies due soon, including one set of twins on the way), and one had four children. The average age of the children was eight years and nine months (M=8.75). Five of the participants had at least one child of preschool age or younger, while another participant with children of school age was about to have another baby.

The venue was the lounge in the HR head office, and the interview took place after lunch (from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm), with afternoon tea. (The refreshments were well received by all of the groups, as they don’t have coffee and tea readily available in the company).

Participants were asked to say which section of the company they worked in, whether they had a partner, how many children they had, whether or not their partner worked, and if so, whether that was full-time or part-time.

All participants in the group had partners, indeed all of them were married. Nine of the partners were in paid employment (while the male employee whose partner was not in paid employment outside the home was keen to stress that his partner did work). Of these, four worked full-time and five worked part-time, two of whom were self-employed in their own businesses part-time.

Partners’ focus group

The women in the partners’ focus group were not the actual partners of the men in the employees’ focus group. They were all, of course, partners of men who worked at the company, but not of the particular men who comprised the employees’ group included in this research.

There were only five participants. The low number was due to the difficulty of finding a time when they were all available. The group was held during the day, so it was limited to those who either did not work during the day, or did not work on the particular day.
the group was held. The option of a night group was also explored, indeed at one point the facilitator considered holding both. However, even fewer participants could make an evening time. All of the partners stayed at home to care for children and undertake household duties during every day, although one also worked some shifts at night and on weekends.

Three of the participants had two children (one was also pregnant with her third child), and two had three children. The average age of the children was almost seven-and-a-half years (M=7.42). Three of the participants had at least one child of preschool age or younger. There were two children present for most of the group (a young baby and a toddler). This made for some practical difficulties in this group (e.g. talking over a crying baby), although it was obviously appropriate given the subject matter.

The participants’ partners had been employed at company number one for an average of just over nine years (M=9.2 years), ranging from two years to 19-and-a-half years.

The venue was the lounge in the HR head office, on Thursday morning (10.00 am to noon), with morning tea.

Participants were asked to introduce themselves and their children, to say whether they were also in paid employment, and to describe where and how long their partners had worked at for this company.

Supervisors’ focus group

There were seven participants, supervisors from Product Development and other areas. They had worked for the company for periods of time ranging from six-and-a-half to 31 years (a mean of 19-and-a-half years). This is indicative of the high number of very long-term employees at this company. All were men, although women had been invited to participate. All had children, the majority of whom were under 16.

The venue was the lounge in the HR head office, after lunch (1.00 pm to 3.00 pm), with afternoon tea.

Interviews

HR managers

There were four interviews with HR managers. Both men and women were represented, as well as various levels of management (up to vice-president level).

Union representative

The interviewee was a salaried employee of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU). The venue was the interviewee’s office.

The schedule of questions for this interview was developed in response to initial findings from this case study. A number of participants had identified the union as a key player in the introduction of family-friendly provisions into the workplace. So while

\[188\]
the union was not included in the original research design, it became apparent that their input would also be needed in developing a picture of men's use of family-friendly provisions at company number one.

Company number two

The fieldwork at company number two involved three focus groups—again with male employees, with the partners of male employees and with immediate supervisors—and nine in-depth interviews—five with managers, two with union representatives, one with a non-union employee representative, and one with a male employee who had been unable to participate in the focus group.

The focus groups

Male employees’ focus group
There were nine participants. One had one child of preschool age; five had two children; and three had three children. All the children except one were under the age of 16, and eight were of preschool age, including two babies less than six months of age. Not all participants said how long they had been working for the company, but of the six who did, four had been with the company and its predecessor for over 20 years. All the participants had partners, one of whom also worked full-time, while another four worked part-time. One of these women had two part-time jobs with hours almost equivalent to full-time work, but organised to fit in with her partner's work and children's school/care arrangements. Another was currently on maternity leave.

Partners’ focus group
There were eight participants in this group. They were the partners either of the men in the male employees’ focus group or of other staff interviewed. Four had two children each; and four had three children each. Four had part-time jobs (one, mentioned above, with two jobs); one did casual work; one was a postgraduate student; and one woman did not give her labour force status. Another woman, with three children under the age of six, caused laughter and disagreement when she said she was not working at the moment—'You are!' she was told.

Supervisors’ focus group
There were five participants, four men and one woman. Two were team leaders and three were managers. All participants supervised male staff with children under the age of 16, except for one manager whose male staff did not have young children although he himself did.
Interviews
There was a total of nine in-depth interviews at this second case study. These included five interviews with HR Managers or General Managers; and three interviews with employee representatives. An in-depth interview was also undertaken with a male employee who had worked as a manager and who had been unable to participate in the focus group. He was the parent of young children and his wife also participated in the partners’ focus group.

All of the interviews were held on site, either in the interviewee’s office or in an office in the company’s reception area.

HR managers and general management
The three HR Managers interviewed represented various levels of management (including one at General Manager level). Interviews were also undertaken with two other General Managers, one of whom was effectively the second-in-command at the company after the Managing Director. Although it was not possible to interview the Managing Director during the fieldwork trip, he expressed a keen interest in the research.

Union representatives
The interviews with employee representatives, union and non-union, were scheduled into the fieldwork for this second case study. There were interviews with two union representatives, from Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia (APESMA) and the local Services Union, and one with a non-union employee representative on the EBA committee representing staff who are not part of a union.
Appendix 2: Research Instruments

Sample interview schedule: HR managers

Remember: Focus on uptake of family-friendly provisions by male employees. Checklist of topics to be covered in a semi-structured interview, with HR or other comparable unit.

1. Policies and procedures pertaining to flexible work practices
[Company number one] has received a number of significant accolades recently which have brought recognition to the employment provisions made by the company (e.g. ACCI National Work and Family Awards (2000 and 2001), Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency Business Achievement Awards).

1.1 What policies and procedures does [company number one] employ to make this workplace more flexible for employees with families?

2. Development of family-friendly policies

2.1 How have these policies been developed?
- Were these policies developed through policy or Workplace Agreements? What is your preference and why?
- How were these particular policy approaches (prompt: from previous response, e.g. job share, work from home) identified?
- Are these policies in response to identified need? Probe: Were the needs of employees with families specifically identified? Were the needs of men separately identified?

2.1 Why do you think the company is interested in creating provisions that are more family friendly?
- Prompt: Were attraction and retention objectives influential in the development of these policies?
- Why do you think the company should be? Probe: Are these the same reasons you think the company is interested?

3. Evaluation of the policies (particularly in regard to the uptake by men of the provisions made)

3.1 How successful do you think your current set of family-friendly policies have been?
- Do the provisions serve employees well?
Appendix 2: Research Instruments

- Probe: Specifically in relation to male employees.
  
  Serve families well? Are they used to provide care for family members? Probe: How do you know this? Are there formal evaluation and assessment procedures that are used to evaluate this?

  Do the provisions serve the Company? How have particular sections of the operation at [company number one] benefited from these changes? (Prompt: Product Development division.) What were the findings of the pilot in the Product Development Provisions.

  What about the benefit to the company overall of more flexible workplace arrangements?

  Do they serve the community more generally? In what ways?

3.2 What do you see as the main focus for change (i.e. towards the development of more flexible provisions)?

- Probe: How does this meet business objectives and staff objectives?

3.3 What room is there for further development? (Are there any gaps in provision?)

- Do you think this will improve employee’s use of these provisions?

- Probe: Again what about male employees specifically?

4. Uptake of family-friendly employment provisions (particularly by men)

4.1 Moving on then to consider who is actually using the more flexible provisions, who has taken up the provisions?

  Prompt: characteristics of these employees (focus on men/occupational groups). Need to specify which provisions are being used and used mostly by whom.

  Who are not making use of these provisions and why?

- Probe: men/particular occupational groups and why aren’t they using them.

- Probe: Barriers to men’s uptake—attitudes towards men’s take-up (by particular groups? Again, men/occupational groups), workplace culture?

4.2 Level of use of provisions, is uptake what you expect? What you hope for? (Greater than? Less than?) Has it been increasing since first implemented?

5. Support for men’s use of provisions and policy implementation

5.1 How does the company view men who use the flexible provisions?

- Prompt: reflect on the use by men versus the use by women of family-friendly employment provisions.

5.2 What role do employees’ immediate supervisors play in implementing the flexible work provisions?

- What is the level of supervisor discretion in negotiating and approving entitlements?

- Probe: role/attitudes of immediate supervisors
6. Work-Life Taskforce

To finish off, I would like to ask some particular questions about the WorkLife taskforce that you have established at [company number one].

- Can you tell me about how the WorkLife Taskforce was established?
- Who initiated it? Who are the key people involved and what is their place in the company?
- Can you tell me about the significance of the taskforce to company overall.
- Does the taskforce have any focus on particular issues relating to men (Prompt: make particular reference to men who are fathers?)

7. Close

Thank you. We've come to the end of the questions that I was aiming to ask for the research.

We've covered six main areas:

- Policies and procedures pertaining to flexible work practices
- Development of family-friendly policies
- Evaluation of the policies
- Uptake of family-friendly employment provisions (particularly by men)
- Support for men's use of provisions and policy implementation Work-Life Taskforce

Is there anything else that you feel is important about any of these areas that you would like to mention?

That's all! Thanks for your time. You've provided some very useful information. I've really enjoyed listening to you.

Sample focus group guide: Supervisors

Remember: Focus on uptake of family-friendly provisions by male employees. Try to focus discussion on what they have actually done in real situations, rather than on hypothetical situations.

1. Introduction

Primarily this research is looking at the use by men of provisions made by their workplace to make meeting family responsibilities as well as work commitments easier. We are therefore very interested in the role and attitude of supervisors of employees and how the balance between an employee's work and family responsibilities is negotiated.

- How many employees do you supervise?
- What proportion is male?
- Number with children?
2. **Work and family responsibilities**

2.1 What role do you play in negotiating the family and work responsibilities of the employees you supervise?

- How have you negotiated employees' commitments to family at work?
- Prompt: for example, if an employee's child has come down sick and has to be picked up from child care, or employee can't come to work, needs to leave early. Or if an employee has a partner in the late stages of pregnancy?

2.2 Do you think being a parent/father makes someone a less good employee?

- Do your male employees find it hard to combine work responsibilities and family responsibilities?
- Is it the same for men and women?

2.3 Presentation day scenario

An employee you supervise has a child who has won a special prize at school. It will be presented to them at the presentation day to be held next week. The presentation day is right in the middle of a shift that employee is scheduled to work, and he is facing some important deadlines.

- What do you think an employee of yours in such a situation might do about it?
- What would you expect your employee to do?
- What would you do if they came forward and said that they wanted to attend?
- How could you as a supervisor support your employee – as person or through work re-arrangement?
- Probe: Team structures so absence not so critical? Make-up time?)
- Probe: What options do you have available to you to support that employee?
- What if the week before another child of theirs had come down ill and had to be picked up from school by your employee?
- Prompt: Has an employee ever come to you in a similar situation?

2.4 After-school care scenario

A male and his partner are both working full-time. They have a school age child (or children) and they both work hours that extend beyond 3.00 p.m. What should they do with regard to caring for the children after school?

- What can the company do with regard to negotiating care for their children after school?
- Probe: Emergency care if child care arrangement falls through, are employees able to take time-off if arrangements fall through?
- What are the factors that would impinge on your decision?

2.5 New baby scenario
If we alter that scenario somewhat and say that the couple who were both working full-time have just had a new baby, their first. What do you think they ought to do?

(Same as above) what can the company do to provide some flexibility?

Probe: how do you weigh up or compare business objectives and pressures against staff needs?

2.6 What impedes your employees combining work and family?

3. **Negotiating work and family responsibilities with employees**

3.1 How are decisions about work and family commitments negotiated?

• Probe: Are these decisions negotiated between you and the employees you supervise?

• Probe: Are you able to recognise the family responsibilities of the employees you supervise in negotiating of work commitments.

3.2 Do supervisors have a level of discretion about who/how employees take up provisions—what guides their judgement (business, performance, personal needs?)

• Prompt: What level of discretion do you have?

• Probe: Is this level of discretion appropriate given your role as a direct supervisor?

4. **Using [company number one]'s policies**

We have already discussed some of the ways in which the company can assist its employees negotiate their work and family lives.

4.1 Have we covered all of the policies that you are aware of the policies that [company number one] has developed to create a better balance between its employees work and family lives?

• Prompt: (depending on what the company has) parental leave/family leave, flex-time, job-share, part-time, flexible start and finish times, telecommuting/work from home arrangements.

How did you find out about them?

• Prompt: (again, depending on what the company has) Training (workshop, seminar), website, company newsletter.

• Probe: Are you aware of legislative entitlements associated with anti-discrimination, etc? (had previous training?)

4.2 Have any of the employees you supervise used the flexible work options offered at [company number one]?

Were these used to make time to meet the needs of their children?

• Prompt: flexi-time, job-share, part-time, flexible start and finish times, telecommuting/work from home arrangements.)
Appendix 2: Research Instruments

What do you think prevents employees from using any of the provisions made by [company number one]?

5. Evaluation of the policies

We have begun to move onto another section of the discussion, that is how do you as supervisors evaluate the policies?

5.1 Do you encourage your employees to consider using these options?

◗ Probe: In what ways? Why/why not? Prompt: Is it a hassle and does this influence your decisions?

5.2 How do you feel about the flexible work options offered by the company?

◗ Prompt: Should they be offered? In what form?

◗ Prompt: Do they pose a problem in achieving work outcomes, in your role as a supervisor?

Do you believe the options offered at [company number one] make meeting family needs easier (specifically for male employees)? or make employees happier? Does it improve retention of employees? Business benefits?

6. Better alternatives

From your point of view, what could this workplace do to make combining work and family life responsibilities easier for male employees?

◗ Prompt: Better alternatives?

7. Close

Thank you. We’ve come to the end of the discussion questions.

◗ We’ve covered five main areas:

◗ Work and family responsibilities

◗ Negotiating work and family responsibilities with employees

◗ Using [company number one]’s policies

◗ Evaluating the policies

◗ Better alternatives

Is there anything else that you feel is important about any of these areas that you would like to mention?

That’s all! Thanks for your time. You’ve provided some very useful information. I’ve really enjoyed listening to this group.
Endnotes

1 The EU institutions themselves had failed to comply with the Directive by October 2001, according to the European Ombudsman, who opened an inquiry into parental leave in the EU institutions to investigate the extent to which their officials had the same right as that guaranteed in the Member States (European Report 2001).

2 The source does not say whether or not this leave is paid, but it is mentioned in the context of maternity leave which is paid.

3 It is difficult to find out the current status of this proposed legislation. Most Portuguese legislation is not translated into English, and neither is it available on the internet. Brief summaries can be found at (http://natlex.ilo.org), but they do not give very much information.

4 At the time of writing, this information has not been included on the French government public service website (http://vosdroits.service-public.fr) which still refers to the three days.

5 The source does not say whether or not the leave is paid, but information from other sources (e.g. Kamerman, 2000) indicates that it is. Neither does the source say how long the leave is.

6 Described above in the section on ‘Gender equity’.

7 These latter percentages may not indicate a fall in coverage, but simply a change in methods of data collection. From 1994, questions about maternity and paternity leave could no longer be distinguished, as they were replaced with questions which combined the two into family leave (Waldfogel 1999). Waldfogel gives the 1991 proportion of employees covered by paternity leave as 27 per cent: ‘the share of full-time employees in medium-sized and large private sector establishments whose employers provided paternity leave doubled from 27 per cent in 1991 to 54 per cent in 1993’ (Waldfogel 1999).

8 Basic entitlements were established by the 1990 and 1991 Parental Leave Cases, which were subsequently imported (with minor changes) into federal law. The following decisions have also been important: Maternity Leave Test Case decision [(1979) 218 CAR 120]; Adoption Leave Test Case decision [(1985) 298 CAR 321]; Parental Leave Test Case decision [Print J3596, 26 July 1990]; Supplementary Award Simplification decision [Print Q5596, 15 September 1998]. The casual employees parental leave test case is found in [Print 904631, 31/5/2001] (Alcorso 2001).

9 In some European countries, collective agreements play a relatively minor role in the provision of parental leave entitlements, since the law already provides
generous and detailed arrangements, e.g. Sweden and Austria. In others, collective bargaining has more of a role to play, although to varying degrees (Eironline 1998).

10 Paid maternity leave is available in the public sector (12 weeks in the Commonwealth Public Service, nine weeks in local government employment in NSW) and in some enterprises (12 months at the Australian Catholic University; and six weeks at Westpac), but only unpaid leave is mandatory (Norington 2001).

11 Both companies had received public recognition for their forward-looking policies through being selected as finalists in the ACCI Corporate Work & Family Awards.
Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions

References


ABS 2000a, *Child Care June 1999*, cat. no. 4402.0, Canberra.


of Work and Family Life—Australia's Background Report, Department of Family and Community Services/Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra.


Dibb, Lupton Alsop 2001a, ‘Increasing Quality Time or Adding to the Burden?’, Be Aware, January.


Men’s uptake of family-friendly employment provisions


Nordic Council and Council of Ministers 2000, ‘Iceland Leading Country in Paternity Leave’, Norden This Week, 10 April: (http://www.norden.org/niv_eng)


Pocock, Barbara, van Wanrooy, Brigid, Strazzari, Stefani and Bridge, Ken 2001, Fifty Families: What Unreasonable Hours are Doing to Australians, Their Families and Their Communities, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Melbourne.


Russell, Graeme and Bowman, Lyndy 2000, Work and Family: Current Thinking, Research and Practice, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.


Sains, Ariane 2001, ‘Charting the Papa Index’, Europe, May, p. 44.


UK Department of Trade and Industry. 2000, Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice, Green Paper: (http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/g_paper/)


