human relations
THE TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE

Crafting a balance between work and home

human relations
65(12) 1539–1559

DOI: 10.1177/0018726712457435
hum.sagepub.com
SAGE

Jane Sturges
King's College London, UK

Abstract
This article reports the findings of a qualitative study that explored the unofficial techniques and activities that individuals use to shape their own work–life balance. It theorizes that this behaviour may be usefully conceptualized as physical, relational and cognitive work–life balance crafting. It identifies the physical, relational and cognitive techniques that young professionals employ to manage their work–life balance and shows that distinct approaches to work–life balance crafting exist, each of which features a specific range of techniques.

Keywords
careers, job crafting, long hours, work–life balance, work/non-work conflict

Introduction

'I think it is up to the individual to manage work–life balance. The onus is on you, because it is quite easy to work all the hours that God gives.'

As this quote (from one of the young professionals who participated in the research reported in this article) suggests, the role that employees play in managing their own work–life balance is important. This may involve them accessing formal organizational work–life balance policies, such as part-time working, but will also include engagement in activities such as customization of the timing and location of work. Yet most research has theorized about the topic from the perspective of organizational policy and practice, examining the uptake of different types of work–life policies (Allen, 2001; Kossek et al.,

Corresponding author:
Jane Sturges, Department of Management, King's College London, Franklin-Wilkins Building, 150 Stamford Street, London SE1 9NH, UK.
Email: jane.sturges@kcl.ac.uk

2006), their facilitation of the achievement of work–life balance (Thomas and Ganster, 1995) and positive outcomes associated with their use, such as improved recruitment and retention, lower rates of absenteeism and a more satisfied and motivated workforce (Dex and Scheibl, 1999; Thompson et al., 1999).

Less is known about how individuals use behaviour such as adjusting the number of hours that they work or the place where they work to manage their own work–life balance. Understanding the use of these unofficial activities should provide important insights into individual management of work–life balance, especially that of young professional and managerial employees. This group has been shown to have a strong interest in the achievement of work–life balance (Lewis et al., 2002) but is often increasingly drawn into working long hours in order to establish their career (Sturges and Guest, 2004). They are unlikely to receive any formal help from their employer to manage their work–life balance; if they want to strike any balance between work and their lives outside work, they must find their own ways of doing so.

This article reports the findings of a qualitative study that explored work–life balance crafting behaviour, defined as the unofficial techniques and activities that individuals use to shape their own work–life balance. It contributes to the literature on work–life balance: firstly by discussing how we might theorize about this behaviour by conceptualizing it as physical, relational and cognitive forms of work–life balance crafting; secondly by identifying the physical, relational and cognitive techniques that young professionals use to manage their work–life balance; and thirdly by showing that different approaches to work–life balance crafting exist, each featuring a specific range of techniques.

Crafting a balance between work and non-work

In order to achieve work–life balance, defined as 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home' (Campbell Clark, 2000: 751), employees need to manage the relationship between the work and non-work aspects of their life, so that they can combine paid work with other parts of their life in a way that they find acceptable (Kossek et al., 1999). This can involve the use of standard, 'formal' organizational policies – written, officially approved human resource policies (Eaton, 2003), such as part-time working (Gregory and Milner, 2009), flexible hours (Anderson et al., 2002) and teleworking (Kossek et al., 2006). It may also involve negotiation of an idiosyncratic deal, whereby an employee is allowed to adapt work arrangements to suit their personal needs, for example, through flexible scheduling of work hours (Hornung et al., 2008). In addition to use of such formal or individually negotiated organizational arrangements, it has been shown that individuals engage in various unofficial behaviours that help them achieve the work–life balance that they seek, for example, employing time management techniques to contain work within contracted hours (Golden and Geisler, 2007), trying to limit workload (Roberts, 2008), working at home occasionally (Tietze, 2002) and using mobile technology to work outside the office (Wacjman et al., 2008).

There are a number of reasons why individuals use such techniques to try to achieve work–life balance. Firstly, they need to supplement the benefits of organizational policies. For example, employees who work part-time may also need to restrict the hours that they spend at work on the days when they work in order to fulfil commitments at home.

Secondly, the context and culture of some workplaces may be antithetical to the use of organizational work–life balance practices (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004; Thompson et al., 1999), especially by male employees (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Thirdly, line managers, who act as 'gatekeepers' to employees being able to access work–life policies, may be unwilling for staff to use them (Breaugh and Frye, 2008), because they fear it will have an impact on performance (Poelmans and Beham, 2008) or because they hold negative attitudes towards specific practices such as teleworking (Peters and Heusinkveld, 2010). Finally, organizational work–life balance policies may be unavailable to or unsuitable for the needs of some groups of employees, such as young workers (Ryan and Kossek, 2008).

To date, little research has taken a theoretical approach to analysing the different kinds of unofficial techniques that individuals, as active managers of their work–life balance, use. Such behaviour may be characterized as being proactive, in that it results from an individual's desire to take control of their work–life balance (Campbell Clark, 2000), self-initiated because it represents individual effort aimed at securing work–life balance (Kossek et al., 1999) and goal-oriented in that it is driven by the individual's aim of achieving work–life balance (Parker et al., 2010). One framework that it might be useful to draw on to deepen our understanding of different work–life balance management activities is Wrzesniewski and Dutton's job-crafting typology, developed to analyse the proactive, self-initiated, goal-oriented behaviour of employees who change the boundaries of their jobs in order to gain control over their work and their identity in the workplace (Berg et al., 2010a; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) argue that, in attempting to craft their jobs, employees engage in three different kinds of behaviour: physical crafting, which involves crafting the number, scope or type of job tasks; cognitive crafting, which involves defining and framing perceptions of what a job means and entails; and relational crafting, which involves managing the quantity and quality of interactions with other people at work in order to reinforce and maintain a desirable work identity. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) provide examples of each kind of crafting from a number of studies (e.g. Benner et al., 1996; Cohen and Sutton, 1998; Fletcher, 1998) and have since confirmed the validity of the typology in an empirical article (Berg et al., 2010a). Other research has also provided examples of different kinds of job crafting in a range of work settings, including sales forces (Lyons, 2008), colleges (Leana et al., 2009) and not-for-profit organizations (Berg et al., 2010b).

What we propose in this article is that it may be conceptually useful to draw on the physical, relational and cognitive distinctions made in the job-crafting typology to theorize about different kinds of work–life balance management behaviour. We base this proposition on the findings of previous research, which suggest that individuals engage in types of physical, relational and cognitive crafting to manage their work–life balance. Earlier studies have shown that individuals craft 'physical' aspects of their work–life balance – the time they spend on work and where they spend it – through activities such as working from home on an occasional basis (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2006), using mobile technology such as mobile phones and BlackBerrys to work away from the office (Golden and Geisler, 2007; Towers et al., 2006) and altering the length of the working day (Roberts, 2008; Tietze and Musson, 2002). Individuals have been shown to craft their work–life balance through the management of work and non-work

relationships, for example, by clarifying bosses' expectations about the workload that they can handle (Antonioni, 1996) and managing spouses' and friends' ideas about how hard they need to work (Powell and Greenhaus, 2006). Finally, they have been shown to engage in cognitive crafting by defining how they view and enact work–life balance (Kossek et al., 1999; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Roberts, 2008).

We believe that the behaviour that individuals employ to manage their work–life balance has some important similarities with job-crafting behaviour, in terms of being proactive, self-initiated and goal-oriented. We do not suggest, however, that job crafting as a concept can be applied uncritically to an analysis of work–life balance behaviour, as there may be differences between crafting a job and crafting work–life balance in terms of emphasis and outcome. Work–life balance is constructed subjectively by individuals (Kossek et al., 1999), whereas a job may have at least some aspects objectively defined by the organization (Ilgen and Hollenbeck, 1992). While job crafting often involves changing aspects of a job, in order to suit personal work preferences (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), crafting a work–life balance does not necessarily entail change but rather concerns the management of factors that affect the balance between work and non-work, (Campbell Clark, 2000; Emslie and Hunt, 2009). Job-crafting techniques are largely unauthorized behaviours (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), whereas authorization may be sometimes be required for some kinds of work–life balance crafting behaviour, for example, working at home.

The present study addresses the limitations of existing literature on work–life balance by exploring the range of physical, cognitive and relational behaviours in which young professionals engage to manage their work–life balance. Young professionals face special pressures as they attempt to establish themselves in demanding careers, where they are often expected to work long hours (Sturges, 2008). Previous research has shown that they have a strong interest in achieving work–life balance (Lewis et al., 2002; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Sturges and Guest, 2004) but anticipate receiving little support from employers to help them achieve it (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). However, little is yet known about the activities that young professionals use to try to manage their work–life balance.

The article aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What techniques do young professionals in the early stages of their career use to manage their work–life balance?
2. Which techniques might be classified as physical, relational and cognitive forms of work–life balance crafting?
3. What patterns of work–life balance crafting techniques do young professionals engage in?

Method

The research reported in this article was part of a larger study about work–life balance conducted for the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) by the author. The study used a sample of university graduates with approximately three years' work experience who worked for seven large UK organizations. The participating organizations were all AGR members, chosen by AGR to take part in the research because they represented

different business sectors. They included a law firm, a public sector organization, a professional services firm, an IT consultancy, a petrochemical company, a retailer and an actuarial firm. All of the organizations employed over 1000 staff in the UK. Only one employer, the public sector organization, made flexitime and teleworking available to all employees on a formal basis.

Each firm was asked to nominate up to six professional or managerial employees who had joined the organization in a graduate trainee position and were now three years into their career. The participating organizations were given a brief to choose participants who were as representative as possible of their graduate population, in terms of sex, race and type of work that they did. A final sample of 34 young professionals (20 men and 14 women) from the seven organizations was achieved. The average age of the sample was 26 years. All were employed on a full-time contract. Just three people (two men and one woman) were parents; none of the participants was currently using any of their organization's formal HRM policies to help manage their work–life balance. A total of 22 participants worked 5 or more overtime hours each week, with 12 working 10 or more overtime hours.

Because the research questions were exploratory in nature, aimed at uncovering the participants' own accounts of the techniques that they used to manage their work–life balance, a qualitative approach was taken to data gathering and analysis (Cassell and Symon, 1994). In line with this approach, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, in order to elicit detailed accounts of work–life balance crafting behaviour from the participants. An interview schedule was drawn up that allowed questioning to be responsive to participants' own experiences and insights. Each interview covered the same specific areas of questioning, but encouraged participants to 'shape their own narrative' (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003) and talk freely about how they managed their work–life balance. This was seen as offering the best means of answering the research questions. Areas of questioning covered: (i) what a 'good' work–life balance meant to the participants on their own terms, how important achieving this was to them, and what they thought they had to do at work and outside work to try to achieve a work–life balance on their own terms; (ii) whether they thought that they had a good work–life balance; (iii) why they tolerated a less than perfect work–life balance; (iv) what factors contributed to the achievement of an acceptable work–life balance; (v) to what extent they thought managing work–life balance was their responsibility; and (vi) what they did to manage their own work–life balance and what they might do to improve it. The interviews were conducted in spring 2008 by two interviewers employed by the author. Each research participant was interviewed for approximately one and a half hours at their workplace, where they were given time away from work to participate in the interviews. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

The data analysis was conducted by the author and followed the steps recommended by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) and Ritchie et al. (2003). Firstly, the author familiarized herself with the data in order to identify recurring themes relating to different kinds of behaviour aimed at crafting work–life balance. From this familiarization process, together with reference to relevant literature, an initial thematic framework was derived. This was then used to sort and code the interview data. The thematic framework was developed and amended as coding progressed and further kinds of crafting behaviour were identified. For example, the category of physical crafting created to describe

crafting that related to where and when work participants worked was expanded to include the crafting behaviours of choosing an employer and moving to live near work, identified in the later stages of coding. A cognitive crafting category relating to participants' managing their own expectations about what they could achieve at work was dropped from the analysis because coding of the data did not support the existence of this kind of behaviour.

Following the development of the thematic framework, the data were charted, that is located in the framework. This allowed the salience of themes to be examined, and comparisons and links across crafting categories to be identified. In practice, the analytical process did not follow these stages in an entirely linear fashion but was more iterative. As the thematic framework was developed it was compared with relevant literature, in order to enable further clarification, prompt insights and strengthen the reliability of the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Interview data were revisited and reinterrogated as analysis progressed in order to check and confirm the coherence and salience of emerging themes and concepts relating to work–life balance crafting behaviour.

Findings

All of the young professionals interviewed said that achieving a balance between work and their lives outside work was important to them; the majority (24) believed that their work–life balance was currently good. This was despite that fact that half of this group worked at least five hours' overtime each week. Only five believed that their work–life balance was poor, with a further five feeling unsure whether they thought it was good or bad. It is interesting to note that some of those who worked the longest hours still believed that they had a satisfactory work–life balance.

The findings indicate that all of the research participants engaged in some kind of crafting behaviour aimed at shaping and managing their work–life balance actively. Data analysis identified different forms of physical, cognitive and relational crafting. The different kinds of crafting techniques found are discussed in the following sections. Examples of them and details of their frequency are presented in Table 1. Table 1 and the quotations used in the following sections use the pseudonyms give to the participants for the purposes of the study.

Physical crafting

The data analysis showed that much of the crafting behaviour that the participants engaged in was aimed at shaping the 'physical' factors that affected their work–life balance – the time they spent on work, where work time was spent, what job they worked in and how much time they spent travelling to work. All but two of those interviewed utilized at least one of these forms of physical crafting.

Temporal crafting

Temporal crafting involved managing time spent on work in terms of the length, timing and temporal experience of the working day, in order to support the achievement of

Table 1 Frequency and examples of work–life balance crafting techniques

Work–life balance crafting technique	Explanation	Users	Illustration
Physical crafting			
Temporal crafting	Managing the length, timing and temporal experience of the working day	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Bruce (Law firm)[a] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Anne (Law firm)[a] Bridget (Law firm)[a, b] David (IT)[b] Ewan (IT) Fred (IT)[a] Graham (IT)[a] Clare (IT) Howard (IT)[a] Ian (Public sector)[a] Jack (Public sector) Diane (Public sector)[b] Kevin (Public sector) Eleanor (Prof. services) Flora (Prof. services)[c] Nancy (Prof. services)[b] Oliver (Prof. services)[a] Peter (Petrochem)[a, b] Gemma (Petrochem)[a, b] Stephen (Petrochem)[a, b, c] Holly (Petrochem) Tom (Petrochem)[a, b, c] Jenny (Actuary)[a] Kate (Actuary)[a] Vincent (Actuary)[a] Lily (Actuary)[a, b] Martha (Actuary)[a] William (Actuary)[a, b]	If I was really, really busy and stuff needed to get done, I could come in earlier the following day or I could do it by staying later the following day or something … I'm quite busy in the evenings. I'm somebody who likes to be out doing sport or meeting friends and things like that so I tend to go out every evening and work doesn't stop me doing that. (Eleanor) If I know there's something to do, I'm not going to sit there gossiping or talking. I want to get it done; I want to get out of the office basically. Whereas there are other people in the department who have a slightly different stance on things … they do more hours than I do and I think part of this is because they don't necessarily manage their time as much. (Oliver) If I want to work less hours I'd speak to my manager and say I'm too busy, I think I've got too many clients, can you please take some away from me? (Kate)

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Work–life balance crafting technique	Explanation	Users	Illustration
Locational crafting	Working away from the office to blend work and non-work	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Bruce (Law firm)[a] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Anne (Law firm)[a] David (IT)[b] Fred (IT)[a] Graham (IT)[a] Howard (IT)[a] Ian (Public sector)[a] Diane (Public sector)[b] Flora (Prof. services)[c] Nancy (Prof. services)[b] Richard (Petrochem) Stephen (Petrochem)[a, b, c] Holly (Petrochem) Lily (Actuary)[a, b]	A lot of the time you don't even have to ask to be honest, you just think to yourself, I've got a meeting there at 10 so there's no point me going into work before, or if it finishes at lunch time there's no point going into the office, so you just come back and write stuff up at home. It's pretty easy. (Ian) I think it's a good thing to be able to take work home just because it might be a slightly more relaxing environment in which to do it. And that must be good for your well-being. And with email you can be reached much more easily. (Bruce)
Choosing a job	Choosing an employer, job or project which facilitates work–life balance	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Bridget (Law firm)[a, b] Ewan (IT) Diane (Public sector)[b] Kevin (Public sector) Liam (Public sector) Eleanor (Prof. services) Oliver (Prof. services)[a]	Individuals set their balance, in the sense that when I apply for new roles I make sure they're in London. Recently I got offered a role near Heathrow but I didn't take it because I know that's a one and a half hour journey there and a one and half hour journey back. (Ewan)
Reducing travelling time	Moving to live nearer work to reduce travelling time	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Flora (Prof. services)[c]	I moved close specifically when I qualified because I knew I'd be working a bit longer. (Alistair)

Table 1 (Continued)

Work–life balance crafting technique	Explanation	Users	Illustration
Cognitive crafting			
Defining work–life balance	Defining work–life balance in a way that makes it possible for it to be achieved.	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Bruce (Law firm)[a] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Anne (Law firm)[a] Bridget (Law firm)[a, b] Peter (Petrochem)[a, b] Gemma (Petrochem)[a, b] Imogen (Retailer)[a] Kate (Actuary)[a]	… being able to go out in the evening during the week. Not necessarily late but to actually have the odd evening where you can go out to the theatre or go out to dinner with friends or go for a drink … to have dinner at home … not necessarily to have to bring work home. (Bruce)
Prioritizing work	Justifying spending time at work rather than at home or on other leisure activities	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Bruce (Law firm)[a] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Anne (Law firm)[a] Bridget (Law firm)[a, b] Ewan (IT) Fred (IT)[a] Graham (IT)[a] Clare (IT) Howard (IT)[a] Oliver (Prof. services)[a] Peter (Petrochem)[a, b] Imogen (Retailer)[a] Kate (Actuary)[a] Vincent (Actuary)[a] William (Actuary)[a, b]	Because I'm really junior, I say to myself that it's a good thing that I'm doing this work, because in two weeks' time I'll be able to say, well, I've done this transaction, I've got this type of experience and I've got this under my belt … so at the moment I quite like the idea of doing lots of work to get lots of experience. (Anne)
Making compromises	Sacrificing an 'ideal' work–life balance in return for future benefits	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Anne (Law firm)[a] Ewan(IT) Fred (IT)[a] Clare (IT) Matthew (Public sector)[a] Eleanor (Prof. services) Nancy (Prof. services)[b] Peter (Petrochem)[a, b] Gemma (Petrochem)[a, b] Imogen (Retailer)[a] Kate (Actuary)[a] Martha (Actuary)[a]	I guess at this stage I don't mind spending more hours in the office because I want to progress further with my career. It's not the case that I have kids and I have to go home and cook for them. If I sacrifice an hour or two of watching TV or surfing the internet it's probably worth it at the moment. (Kate)

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Work–life balance crafting technique	Explanation	Users	Illustration
Relational crafting			
Managing work relationships	Using relationships with bosses and colleagues to facilitate work–life balance	Bruce (Law firm)[a] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Bridget (Law firm)[a, b] David (IT)[b] Jack (Public sector) Flora (Prof. services)[c] Nancy (Prof. services)[b] Oliver (Prof. services)[a] Gemma (Petrochem)[a, b] Richard (Petrochem) Stephen (Petrochem)[a, b, c] Holly (Petrochem) Tom (Petrochem)[a, b, c] Jenny (Actuary)[a] Kate (Actuary)[a] Vincent (Actuary)[a] William (Actuary)[a]	It's about trust as well. I've worked under or with my direct manager for two years and prior to that I worked alongside him. He knows I'm a conscientious guy and I like to get things done properly and I'm not a shirker. So he can trust me. (David)
Managing out-of work relationships	Using relationships with friends and family to support and maintain personal concept of work–life balance	Alistair (Law firm)[a, b] Carl (Law firm)[a, b] Anne (Law firm)[a] Bridget (Law firm)[a, b] Graham (IT)[a] Gemma (Petrochem)[a, b] Imogen (Retailer)[a] Jenny (Actuary)[a] Kate (Actuary)[a]	Because my girlfriend's a solicitor as well we pretty much kind of don't see each other during the week. We would never really plan to eat together or spend evenings together. So I don't think I have a particular cut-off line in terms of having to get home for dinner or wanting to spend quality time with my girlfriend because it's just not the kind of lifestyle that we lead. (Alistair)

[a]Works five or more hours overtime a week; [b] married/living with a partner; [c] parent.

work–life balance. The commonest way for people to manage the length and timing of the working day was to ensure that they finished work 'in time' to have sufficient personal or family time later in the day. For a few people this meant restricting their working day to contracted working hours as far as possible. For more, it meant leaving work in time to make an evening commitment, such as a trip to the theatre, or dinner with family or friends. One specific method of temporal crafting used was to commit to a regular evening

event, such as an evening class, which made it necessary to leave work punctually. Some people enrolled in evening classes because it helped them to set a limit to the length of their working day, as Holly, a graduate trainee with the petrochemical company, explains:

> I would work longer if I didn't have my evening course. Evening courses actually make me leave so they are quite good for me in that sense. If I wasn't doing an evening course I'd probably stay until 7. (Holly)

Some people controlled the length and timing of the working day by managing when work began. Those who did not mind working later in the evening sometimes preferred to start work later in the morning. Others, like trainee actuary Martha, made sure that they had their evenings free by starting work early:

> I'm an early bird so I tend to come in early in the morning and do an extra bit of work that way. I'd rather come in and start at 8 than spend an extra hour in the evening. (Martha)

Of the 13 participants who varied the timing of their working day in this way, 11 worked for three organizations, the public sector organization, the IT consultancy and the actuarial firm. As Martha's colleague Vincent explains, being able to do this depended on their managers' willingness for staff to have autonomy over their working hours.

> You work whenever you like. It's quite flexible. At the moment, I'm coming in at 8 and taking a two-hour lunch to go to the gym or something similar and staying till 6 or 7 … so there's no 'You must be in between 8 and 7'. (Vincent)

Another means of controlling the length of the working day involved trying to limit the workload one had to handle, with the aim of shortening the time that needed to be spent on work. The success of this means of work–life balance crafting was not entirely under the participants' control, as it depended on whether or not a boss was sympathetic to requests for an individual's workload to be reduced. As this form of temporal crafting involved negotiating with a boss about workload, it also implied engagement in relational crafting, managing and using work and non-work relationships to help secure work–life balance. Relational crafting is described in detail in the following section. Here Bridget, a lawyer, describes how her attempts to manage her work–life balance in this way were not always successful:

> If you say yes to everything that comes in the door then obviously you're going to have a poor work–life balance. There have been times when a partner has said, oh, we'll get this done by such and such time and I haven't had any hesitation about saying, 'Well, that's not a realistic deadline. We need to put that back'. Sometimes it's listened to and sometimes it's not. (Bridget)

Temporal crafting was not just about managing when work began and ended, it also related to the temporal experience of the working day, that is, the pace and intensity of work time. Some people who were expected to work long hours were prepared to go without a lunch break in order to leave earlier in the evening. Others tried to limit the time they spent at work by managing this time as efficiently as possible. Like Tom, a project manager with the petrochemical company who is quoted below, they identified

that work time could be 'saved' by cutting down on meetings and non-work activities, and not spending time socializing with colleagues at work. This also implied engagement in relational crafting, as work relationships needed to be managed to order to reduce meetings and social interactions at work:

> I don't tend to spend a lot of time socializing … and I have to be careful about how many meetings I have in a day … I guess fundamentally I'm not someone that hangs around at work and works all hours. I think I tend to try and condense things and go home and see the family. (Tom)

Locational crafting

Locational crafting involved managing where work time was spent. The findings showed that it specifically related to working away from the office, in order to facilitate work–life balance. There were two different versions of this. Some people worked at home instead of in the office on an occasional basis, usually to enable them to deal with home-related business, such as repairs and deliveries, but sometimes to avoid a lengthy commute or other unnecessary travel. Being able to do this depended how willing their organization and their line manager were for staff to work from home; if this involved negotiating with a boss to be able to work at home, it also entailed a degree of relational crafting, discussed below. Most of the graduates who engaged in this form of locational crafting worked in three organizations – the public sector organization, the professional services firm and the IT firm – where, as Clare, an IT consultant describes below, her manager was happy for her to work away from the office if she wanted to. In contrast, Bridget and Tom both wanted to be able to work from home, but their employers were not supportive of them doing so.

> There is a lot of time that I work from home and it's fine to do that. I don't feel guilty and I don't feel like people are checking up on me because they don't. They very much trust you and you've got to manage your own time. Like I said before, as long as you get your work done they're not really bothered about where you do it. (Clare)

A second, smaller group of people, most of whom were lawyers, worked at home (or elsewhere) beyond their contracted work hours in the evenings, the weekends or even on holiday in order to blend their work with their social and personal lives. This generally involved the use of mobile technology, such as BlackBerrys. Those who used mobile technology in this way claimed that it helped them because it made work portable, thus reducing the number of hours they needed to spend in the office (even though it added to the already long hours that they spent on work). Not surprisingly, trying to blend work with family or social activities sometimes led to conflict, as Carl, a lawyer, recounts here:

> I went away for the weekend and got in trouble with the people I went away with because I was on my BlackBerry on the Friday when we had this deal on. But I probably only spent cumulatively about an hour, just reading emails, forwarding, replying to the odd one. That was much better than if I'd come back in on a Monday with 200 emails to read then. It wasn't great reading a BlackBerry on a holiday but it helped things along. It eases the pain at the other end. (Carl)

Choosing a job

Some participants indicated that an important part of crafting work–life balance on their terms was making decisions about the job they worked in. They made choices about employers, jobs or work projects based on the hours they thought that they would have to work or the location of the job, or both. For some people, choosing an employer was an important means of achieving the kind of work–life balance that they wanted, as Liam, a graduate trainee in the public sector organization explains:

> I don't think that work should impact on other interests in your life … partly the reason I've chosen this job is precisely that I can find that balance. As soon as work was something which prevented me from doing other things, then I would go. I would consider that to not be the right job for me. (Liam)

Others tried to manage their work–life balance by picking jobs within their organization where they thought that they would be able to achieve a more satisfactory work–life balance on their terms, as Alistair, a lawyer, describes:

> When I came to qualify, I took a reasonably practical decision at that point because of the two job offers I had. One was in the corporate transaction department and one was in my current, slightly more advisory, role. And a big part of my decision at that stage was the work–life balance I thought I could have in the corporate advisory department. It's a bit more controllable. You can plan ahead and make sure you get out on a Wednesday whereas in the transaction department that control goes away much more regularly. So I have much better work–life balance than I thought I would when I joined as a City lawyer. (Alistair)

Reducing travelling time

A small number of people crafted their work–life balance by moving to live nearer to their workplace, in order to reduce the amount of time they spent travelling to and from work every day. One of these was the only mother who took part in the research: she wanted to get home from work as soon as possible to be with her daughter. In contrast, two lawyers who worked very long hours had moved to live closer to work so that they could minimize the effect of this on their life outside work, as Carl explains:

> I don't live that far away. I just walk in. It's only a 20-minute walk which is good for my work–life balance. I used to live in Fulham, but we moved offices about a year and half ago and then the commute went up to an hour and ten minutes. I just couldn't be doing that. (Carl)

Cognitive crafting

Cognitive crafting involved defining and framing perceptions of what work–life balance meant and entailed. A total of 21 participants were found to use cognitive forms of crafting. This group included all but two of those who worked 10 or more hours overtime

each week. Three specific forms of cognitive crafting were identified: conceptualizing and defining work–life balance in idiosyncratic terms, prioritizing work at the expense of life outside work: and compromising an ideal work–life balance in return for long- and short-term benefits.

Defining work–life balance

Some interviewees who worked long hours crafted their own idiosyncratic definitions of work–life balance, framed in terms that they believed were possible for them to achieve. Some people defined work–life balance as having their weekends free, although they worked late every night and had no free time during the week. Others saw work–life balance as being able to meet occasional social engagements during the week, even though they worked late most evenings. It was only when they failed to fulfil the terms of their own definition that they felt that their work–life balance was compromised, as described by Alistair, a lawyer who worked at least 10 hours overtime every week:

> If I wasn't able to get to the theatre is probably the key thing for me. I love going to the theatre … we try to go once a fortnight, 7:30 on a random Tuesday or Wednesday night … it really annoys me if I can't get out for that theatre date. So that's kind of my key criterion for whether or not I have a work–life balance. (Alistair)

Prioritizing work

A second kind of cognitive crafting identified involved the prioritization of work at the expense of life outside work. This allowed people to justify spending more time on work than their contract required, either regularly or on a short-term basis. A central part of this form of crafting was to emphasize the importance of various work rewards as a reason for prioritizing work. Such rewards included enjoyment, high pay and opportunities to learn and progress at work, as described by Martha, a trainee actuary:

> I'm ambitious and I know it's going to put me in good stead. Being a qualified actuary is what I want to be. I really enjoy it and if I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't do something that I don't enjoy. (Martha)

Making compromises

Making compromises involved people sacrificing an 'ideal' work–life balance for a limited period of time, in return for potential future benefits. Most commonly, these were future career benefits. An important aspect of compromising was that it involved stressing the bounded nature of the compromise, as Gemma, a graduate trainee in the petrochemical company, explains:

> I guess it's a question of your future expectations because I think for me being young and quite ambitious I'm okay with sacrificing certain luxuries in life to get career advancement in the future. That's a sacrifice I'm willing to make. I mean it's probably not something I'm willing to

> do when I maybe get married and have children. Obviously family comes first but now I can do it and while I can do it I might as well do it. (Gemma)

Sometimes the kind of compromises that people engaged in were much more short-term and allowed them to craft what they considered to be an acceptable work–life balance on a short-term or even day-to-day basis, as described by Imogen, a retail store manager who regularly worked a 50-hour week:

> It doesn't really bother me too much that I sometimes have to work longer because actually in other weeks I can get away a little bit earlier … so there is always generally a balance. (Imogen)

Relational crafting

Relational crafting involved managing and using relationships at work and at home to secure and reinforce the kind of work–life balance that an individual wanted to achieve. A total of 21 of the participants engaged in some kind of relational crafting.

Managing work relationships

The participants who managed relationships at work to help them achieve work–life balance mostly did so to try to get their workload reduced or to reduce unnecessary interactions at work, as discussed above. Other forms of relational crafting in the workplace were not common, although three people identified that building a good relationship with their boss was a means of being given more autonomy to engage in temporal or locational crafting. Kate, a trainee actuary, also identified that it was necessary to shape expectations and perceptions about one's personal circumstances and needs, so that bosses and colleagues would be more supportive of engagement in temporal or locational crafting:

> I would make sure that people know I have other commitments. I think that's important because looking around, if I know that a person's got a daughter and she's sick or whatever, I understand if she has to leave work early or has to take a day off. (Kate)

Managing out-of-work relationships

A group of nine people, all of whom worked long overtime hours, reinforced their attitudes and behaviours relating to work–life balance by socializing and having relationships with people who worked similar hours, and whose conceptualization of work–life balance was similar to theirs. This helped them to maintain the belief that their notion of work–life balance was normal, as well as confirming their work identity. Managing out-of-work relationships in this way supported the cognitive crafting behaviours that such people engaged in to justify a version of work–life balance where life outside work was very limited. Here Bridget, a lawyer, describes how having friends in similar occupations made it easier to cancel social arrangements:

> A lot of my friends are in the City so I think they understand completely. I think it works quite well if everybody understands that, if you pull out of something or that you can't make it, it's not that you're trying to make excuses. (Bridget)

Patterns of crafting techniques

While all of the participants engaged in some kind of crafting behaviour, the findings show that some techniques were used more by certain groups of people. Four distinct groups, who used a specific range of techniques, were identified in the data analysis.

The first group of people crafted their work–life balance mainly through use of temporal crafting, locational crafting (in terms of working at home on an occasional basis) and relational crafting at work (aimed at reducing workload or time management). These people generally worked for the IT consultancy and the professional services firm, where, although there was no formal policy on flexitime or teleworking, it appears that managers were sympathetic to individuals managing their work–life balance in this way. Examples of people who crafted their work–life balance like this are Howard, David, Flora and Oliver.

A second group of people managed their work–life balance mainly through use of temporal crafting and relational crafting at work (aimed at reducing workload or time management). Members of this group did not use locational crafting, usually because the nature of their job made it difficult for them to work at home or because the technology they needed to do so was not made available to them. Examples of people who crafted their work–life balance in this way are Tom and Vincent.

For a third group of people, the most important crafting activity was choosing a workplace or a job where they believed that it would be easier to have a good work–life balance. Members of this group included Kevin, Diane and Liam, who worked for the public sector organization, which was the only employer in the study to make flexitime and teleworking available to all staff. It is interesting to note that participants from the public sector organization generally used fewer crafting techniques than those working in other organizations.

The fourth group included most of those who worked the longest hours. They worked for the law firm, the petrochemical company, the retailer and the actuarial firm. The findings show that they tended to make use of a greater number of crafting techniques than other participants. The main method of crafting that they used was cognitive (especially defining what work–life balance meant to them and compromising). This was supported by locational crafting (in terms of working away from the office in the evenings and at weekends) and relational crafting in terms of using relationships outside work to support their conceptualization of work–life balance. Their attempts to engage in temporal crafting (and relational crafting aimed at managing workload) were often not successful. Members of this group included Alistair, Carl and Gemma.

It is interesting to note that two participants, Lily and Matthew, who said that their work–life balance was bad, appeared to engage in very little crafting behaviour. Lily's situation was different from that of the other participants, in that she had negotiated an idiosyncratic deal, which allowed her to work at home one day a week, because she lived an hour and a half away from work. This possibly meant that it was less necessary for her

to use unofficial crafting techniques. Matthew, who worked nearly twice as many overtime hours as any of the other public sector organization participants, admitted that he found it very difficult to manage his work–life balance because he found it hard to assert himself about his workload and the hours that he worked:

> I think the onus is on you, but I suppose it all depends on how strong-willed or weak-willed you are, the extent that you achieve it. (Matthew)

Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore work–life balance crafting behaviour, defined as the unofficial techniques and activities that individuals use to shape their own work–life balance. The article contributes to the work–life balance literature in three ways. Its first contribution is to identify the range of techniques that young professional employees use to manage their work–life balance. As such, it is the first article to do so, as previous studies have only examined such behaviours on a piecemeal basis (e.g. Golden and Geisler, 2007; Wacjman et al., 2008). The findings show that most people employ a mixture of methods to manage their work–life balance, with some using as many as eight or nine different techniques.

The article's second contribution is to examine how these techniques may be categorized as physical, cognitive and relational forms of work–life balance crafting. Here we draw on a framework developed to analyse job-crafting behaviour (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Our analysis shows that the participants engaged in physical, cognitive and relational forms of work–life balance crafting. Many of the techniques that the research participants used were intended to shape 'physical' factors that influenced their work–life balance: the time they spent on work; where work time was spent; what job they did; and how much time was spent on travelling to work each day. Distinctive forms of cognitive and relational crafting were also identified. For some people, cognitive techniques such as framing and defining what work–life balance meant to them or compromising an ideal work–life balance in return for future rewards were significant aspects of their crafting behaviour. This group also used out-of-work relationships to reinforce their approach to work–life balance crafting and their work identity. Other participants needed to manage relationships at work in order to limit their workload or manage their work time effectively. This meant that there was a degree of interdependency between relational crafting and some forms of physical crafting, similar to the links between task and relational job crafting identified by Berg et al. (2010a).

The article's third contribution is to show not just that some techniques are used more than others, but that distinct approaches to work–life balance crafting exist, each of which features a specific range of techniques. One group of participants relied on a mix of temporal, locational and relational crafting techniques to manage their work–life balance; a second group used temporal and relational crafting; a third group primarily crafted their work–life balance by choosing where they worked. In contrast, a fourth group made more use of cognitive crafting, framing idiosyncratic definitions of work–life balance on terms that seemed achievable to them. The latter group included some of those who worked the longest hours; the findings suggest that for such people, cognitive

crafting may be an important means of helping them to believe that they have some control over their work–life balance.

The differences found between the four groups raise the question of what influences peoples' decision to craft their work–life balance in a particular way. Firstly, the findings suggest that work context may be an important factor. For example, those who had to work the longest overtime hours tended to craft their work–life balance in a different way from the other young professionals, presumably because they did not have the same scope to engage in temporal crafting. Secondly, individual differences may influence crafting behaviour. Individuals with high levels of work involvement and who identify strongly with their organization and their occupation may prioritize work and as a result engage in cognitive crafting to justify spending long hours on it (Ng and Feldman, 2008). As work–life balance crafting is a form of proactive behaviour, those with a proactive personality may also be more likely to engage in it (Seibert et al., 1999).

The findings reported in this article are subject to limitations that result from the study design, the research methods used and the data gathered. The research used qualitative methods; other research methods might be useful for gaining further insights into work–life balance crafting. Only large organizations took part in the research; it is possible that the opportunities for work–life balance crafting may be different in smaller firms. The participants were selected by the organizations that took part in the study; their selection could have been biased in favour of individuals who had positive attitudes towards their employer. The study sample comprised young managerial and professional employees in the early years of their career, most of whom did not have children. It is possible that work role, family circumstances and career stage may all affect the kind of work–life crafting behaviour that an individual uses. Finally, the study did not specifically identify any behaviour that could not be classified as physical, cognitive or relational crafting. It is possible that other forms of work–life crafting behaviour may exist that fall outside this categorization but have yet to be identified. Further research using other methods and different samples is needed to explore work–life balance crafting behaviour in greater depth.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the practical implications of the findings. It matters to employers that staff feel that they are able to craft a satisfactory balance between work and their lives outside work, because as the literature shows, this can lead to improved recruitment and retention, lower rates of absenteeism and a more satisfied and motivated workforce (Dex and Scheibl, 1999). If, as the findings suggest, crafting techniques are an important means of employees achieving work–life balance, then organizations need to consider how they can facilitate such behaviour where possible, for example, through line management support and measurement of performance by results, rather than time spent in the office.

Funding

This work was supported by the Association of Graduate Recruiters.

References

Allen T (2001) Family supportive work environments: The role of organizational perceptions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 58(3): 414–435.

Anderson S, Coffey B and Byerly R (2002) Formal organizational initiatives and informal workplace practices: Links to work-family conflict and job-related outcomes. *Journal of Management* 28(6): 787–810.

Antonioni D (1996) Two strategies for responding to stressors: Managing conflict and clarifying work expectations. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 11(2): 287–295.

Arthur S and Nazroo J (2003) Designing fieldwork strategies and materials. In: Ritchie J and Lewis J (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: SAGE.

Benner P, Tanner C and Chesla C (1996) *Expertise in Nursing Practice*. New York: Springer.

Berg J, Wrzesniewski A and Dutton J (2010a) Perceiving and responding to challenges in job crafting at different ranks: When proactivity requires adaptivity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 31: 158–186.

Berg J, Grant A and Johnson V (2010b) When callings are calling: Crafting work and leisure in pursuit of unanswered occupational callings. *Organization Science* 21(5): 973–994.

Blair-Loy M and Wharton A (2004) Organizational commitment and constraints on work-family policy use: Corporate flexibility policies in a global firm. *Sociological Perspectives* 47(3): 243–267.

Breaugh J and Frye N (2008) Work-family conflict: The importance of family-friendly employment practices and family-supportive supervisors. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 22: 345–353.

Campbell Clark S (2000) Work-family border theory: A new theory of work−life balance. *Human Relations* 53(6): 747–770.

Cassell C and Symon G (1994) Qualitative research in work contexts. In: Cassell C and Symon G (eds) *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: SAGE.

Cohen R and Sutton R (1998) Clients as a source of enjoyment on the job: How hairstylists shape demeanor and personal disclosure. In: Wagner J (ed.) *Advances in Qualitative Organization Research*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Dex S and Scheibl F (1999) The business case for family-friendly policies. *Journal of General Management* 24(4): 22–37.

Eaton S (2003) If you can use them: Flexibility policies organizational commitment and perceived performance. *Industrial Relations* 42: 145–167.

Emslie C and Hunt K (2009) 'Live to work' or 'work to live'? A qualitative study of gender and work-life balance among men and women in mid-life. *Gender Work and Organization* 16(1): 151–172.

Eisenhardt K (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532–550.

Fletcher J (1998) Relational practice: A feminist reconstruction of work. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 7: 163–186.

Golden A and Geisler C (2007) Work-life boundary management and the personal digital assistant. *Human Relations* 60(3): 519–551.

Gregory A and Milner S (2009) Work-life balance: A matter of choice? *Gender Work & Organization* 16(1): 1–13.

Hornung S, Rousseau D and Glaser J (2008) Creating flexible work arrangements through idiosyncratic deals. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(3): 655–664.

Ilgen D and Hollenbeck J (1992) The structure of work: Job design and roles. In: Dunnette M and Hough L (eds) *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Kaufman-Scarborough C (2006) Time use and the impact of technology: Examining workspaces in the home. *Time & Society* 15(1): 57–80.

Kossek E, Lautsch B and Eaton S (2006) Telecommuting control and boundary management: Correlates of policy use and practice job controls and work-family effectiveness. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 68: 347–367.

Kossek E, Noe R and DeMarr B (1999) Work-family synthesis: Individual and organizational determinants. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 10(2): 102–129.

Leana C, Appelbaum E and Shevchuk I (2009) Work process and quality of care in early childhood education: The role of job crafting. *Academy of Management Journal* 52(6): 1169–1192.

Lewis S and Smithson J (2001) Sense of entitlement to support for the reconciliation of employment and family life. *Human Relations* 54(11): 1455–1481.

Lewis S, Smithson J and Kugelberg C (2002) Into work: Job insecurity and changing psychological contracts. In: Brannen J, Lewis S, Nilsen A and Smithson J (eds) *Young Europeans Work and Family*. London: Routledge.

Lyons P (2008) The crafting of jobs and individual differences. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 23: 25–36.

Nippert-Eng C (1996) *Home and Work*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ng T and Feldman D (2008) Long work hours: A social identity perspective on meta-analysis data. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 29: 853–880.

Parker S, Bindl U and Strauss K (2010) Making things happen: A model of proactive motivation. *Journal of Management* 36(4): 827–856.

Peters P and Heusinkveld S (2010) Institutional explanations for managers' attitudes towards telehomeworking. *Human Relations* 63(1): 107–135.

Poelmans S and Beham B (2008) The moment of truth: Conceptualizing managerial work-life policy allowance decisions. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 81: 393–410.

Powell G and Greenhaus J (2006) Managing incidents of work-family conflict: A decision-making perspective. *Human Relations* 59(9): 1179–1212.

Ritchie J and Spencer L (1994) Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In: Bryman A and Burgess R (eds) *Analysing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Ritchie J, Spencer L and O'Connor W (2003) Carrying out qualitative analysis. In: Ritchie J and Lewis J (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: SAGE.

Roberts E (2008) Time and work-life balance: The roles of 'temporal customisation' and 'life temporality'. *Gender Work & Organization* 15(5): 430–453.

Ryan A and Kossek E (2008) Work-life policy implementation: Breaking down or creating barriers to inclusiveness. *Human Resource Management* 47(2): 295–310.

Seibert S, Crant J and Kraimer M (1999) Proactive personality and career success. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84: 416–427.

Smithson J and Stokoe E (2005) Discourses of work-life balance: Negotiating 'genderblind' terms in organizations. *Gender Work and Organization* 12(2): 147–168.

Smola K and Sutton C (2002) Generational differences: Revisiting generational work values for the new millennium. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 23: 363–382.

Sturges J (2008) All in a day's work? Career self-management and management of the boundary between work and non-work. *Human Resource Management Journal* 18(2): 118–134.

Sturges J and Guest D (2004) Working to live or living to work: Work/life balance and organisational commitment amongst graduates. *Human Resource Management Journal* 14(4): 5–20.

Thomas L and Ganster D (1995) Impact of family-supportive work variables on work–family conflict and strain: A control perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 80(1): 6–15.

Thompson C, Beauvais L and Lyness K (1999) When work-family benefits are not enough: The influence of work-family culture on benefit utilisation organisational attachment and work-family conflict. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 54: 392–415.

Tietze S (2002) When 'work' comes 'home': Coping strategies of teleworkers and their families. *Journal of Business Ethics* 41(4): 385–396.
Tietze S and Musson G (2002) When work meets home: Temporal flexibility as lived experience. *Time & Society* 11(2/3): 315–334.
Towers I, Duxbury L and Thomas J (2006) Time thieves and space invaders: Technology work and the organisation. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 19(5): 593–618.
Wacjman J, Bittman M and Brown J (2008) Families without borders: Mobile phones connectedness and work-home division. *Sociology* 42(4): 635–652.
Wrzesniewski A and Dutton J (2001) Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review* 26(2): 179–201.

Jane Sturges is Senior Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour in the Department of Management at King's College London, UK. Her current research interests focus on exploring work−life balance and conflict, the long hours culture, job crafting, the employment relationship and careers from the individual perspective − in particular careers as callings. Her work has been published in journals such as *Journal of Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management Journal, Work, Employment and Society* and *British Journal of Management*. She is an editorial board member of *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. [Email: jane.sturges@kcl.ac.uk]