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New forms of work

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Flexible Working Time Arrangements

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1. Description of the main elements of the good practice

1.1. Background and general Dutch policy context

Part-time work has generally been considered an effective measure to help employees achieve a better work-life balance. To enhance gender equality in the labour market, Dutch labour-market regulations have focused on combating discrimination of part-time workers (and those on fixed-term employment contracts) as regards pay and other terms and conditions¹. And it is partly due to these regulations that part-time work has become increasingly more accepted, even in more high level jobs.

Dutch households, including the younger generations, particularly prefer the ‘one-and-a-half-earner-model.’ Most men hold full-time or larger part-time jobs, while most women hold larger or smaller part-time jobs. As a result, working women’s current working hours average just 25 hours per week. It is because of this that, up until now, there have been few initiatives aimed at tackling any obstacles to women working more hours.

Yet, a recent advice from the Social and Economic Council (SER) advocated a new ‘time-spatial’ organisation of work and services to better facilitate combining paid and private activities over the life cycle². Within this concept, employers would allow employees more *time-spatial flexibility* alongside such measures as extending the opening hours of private and public facilities (e.g., schools, child care, council offices, libraries, hospitals, family doctors, dentists, and pharmacies) and the use of digital services, to enable both men and women to participate (longer hours) in the labour market and to balance work and family.

Particularly because of mounting concerns over the effects of the ageing workforce, the attention of Dutch policy makers has focused on making more use of the existing supply of labour. This includes addressing the ‘unused potential’ and ‘underused potential’ in the Netherlands and encompasses the lower educated, semi- and unskilled, or disabled persons, as well as higher educated people, particularly women working part-time or not participating in the labour market altogether. In reality the problem of the ageing population extends beyond the labour market and policy also makes speak of a ‘care problem.’ The ageing population is expected to result in a higher demand for formal care which will impact on the supply of professional care

¹ Examples are the Equal Treatment in Working Hours Act; the Equal Treatment of Temporary and Permanent Employees Act; and the Adjustment of Working Hours Act. The latter Act, introduced in 2000, gives all employees the legal right to adjust their current working hours, either reducing or extending these. As a rule, employers in large and medium sized enterprises have to grant the requested adjustment, unless this can be shown to seriously affect their business interests.

² Advies nr. 2011/06 (<http://www.ser.nl>).

workers and care facilities, all of which are likely to push up the costs to the government and to health insurance providers. Consequently, it is felt that for the long-term care system to be sustainable, an extensive contribution from informal carers will be needed and so there will have to be more workers combining their work with providing informal care³. This requirement will have to be balanced against any increase in working hours and employers will need to be more aware of managing the work-life balance.

With regard to the growing need to make better use of the Dutch labour potential, research has shown that a large proportion of women would consider increasing their labour-market hours (2 to 4 more hours per week on average), but only if they could work more flexibly and in preference to increasing the hours of childcare.⁴⁵ This finding is consistent with wider views on flexibility in the Netherlands.

For example, one study by TNS-NIPO⁶ showed that 85% of those aged 18-65 held positive attitudes towards flexible working. Flexible working meant that more time could be spent on non-work activities and for most workers flexibility led to increased job satisfaction. At the same time, flexible workers were able to do more overtime and to manage higher workloads. However, according to most people, more needs to be done to allow greater flexible working, though with greater clarity from employers on what tasks can fit into the flexible working mode and more support in terms of facilities (such as IT) and colleagues.

In the Netherlands, flexible working is seen as an important measure to attract and retain skills. Moreover, there is political pressure for employers to offer telework (for at least one day per week), unless this would seriously harm the employers' interests, though at present the social partners hold opposing views. In fact, part-time work is no longer seen as offering enough for a satisfactory work-life strategy. Therefore, pressures to adopt other types of flexible work arrangements are strong. As of 2010, the Netherlands have seen the launch of various media campaigns⁷ aimed at increasing employees' and employers' awareness and acceptance of flexible working. Furthermore, flexible working is viewed to provide a cheaper and less disruptive alternative in comparison with other work-life arrangements.

More broadly, Dutch government policy favours flexible working initiated at the company level to collective agreements and regulations aimed at stimulating women's labour-market participation, gender equality, and improving both men's and women's work-life balance. However, any increase in flexible working would require some support from public funds to keep down the extra costs to employers.

This discussion paper primarily focuses on the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's '*Customised Working*' initiative which aims to bring about a *cultural change* among public and private employers in the integration of flexible working in their human resource practice. However, because it is a relatively new instrument, it will be considered in a wider Dutch policy context focusing on flexible working. The paper presents a selection of initiatives regarding flexible working which are expected to have positive consequences for employers, employees and society at large. It aims to

³ In 2020, the share of 'working carers' in the workforce is expected to have doubled, arriving at one in four employees being a working carer (www.werkenmantelzorg.nl).

⁴ Keuzenkamp et al. (2009).

⁵ Merens et al. (2011).

⁶ In commission of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the former Program Ministry of 'Youth and Family' (Koenen, Vieira, & Verhue, 2010).

⁷ www.hetnieuwewerkendoejezelf.nl;
<http://www.fmm.nl/dossier-het-nieuwe-werken.86061.lynkx>

develop a better understanding of factors driving or underpinning the adoption of new flexible-working policies and practices, to frame the adoption, acceptance and diffusion of such policies, and to examine how flexibility is helping employees attain a better work-life balance, personal well-being and organisational performance. The paper concludes by presenting some points for further discussion.

Note that in the TNS-NIPO study mentioned earlier, flexible working was presented under the heading of **New Forms of Working**. In fact, this label which has been used in discussions on flexible working refers to a wide variety of flexible work-arrangements regarding employee control over time, place and duration of work. The various flexible work-arrangements focused on in this discussion paper are defined below.

- **(Voluntary) part-time work** relates to contractual working hours lower than the full-time norm, in the Dutch case, less than 35 hours per week;
- **Flexi-time** refers to increased control over their working hours, allowing workers to vary the beginning and ending of their working days;
- **Individual scheduling** relates to work activities which mainly demand employees' physical presence. Employees are not only given more control over the timing of their working hours (e.g., shifts), but also participate in and have responsibility regarding the work-scheduling process itself;
- **Teleworking**, including mobile work and tele(home)working, is often bilaterally negotiated for with the employees' line managers, and can be defined as an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks remotely (at home) that are normally done in a primary or central workplace⁸, often but not necessarily being associated with enhanced job autonomy. In some studies, own-account workers are also included in the telework definition;
- **New Ways to Work (NWW)**: This concept goes beyond teleworking and refers to a novel form of work organisation that comprises a fundamentally new work philosophy and related management practices. These may include a 'flexible office,' remote working (from home), and intensified use of IT to collaborate with colleagues, allowing employees to potentially work 'twenty-four seven' outside of centralised workplaces. In the Dutch context, NWW is often defined as "a vision to make work more effective and efficient, but also more enjoyable for the organisation and the employee. This vision is realised by focusing on the employee and by giving him –within certain limits- room and freedom to decide how he/she works, where he/she works, when he/she works, with what he/she works, and with whom he/she works."⁹

1.2 The goals and the target groups of the good practice

The Bakker Commission¹⁰ (2008) highlighted an imbalance of supply and demand in future Dutch labour market due to an increasing number of the baby-boomer generation retiring alongside an increased demand for labour, especially in the service sector. The report suggested that Dutch labour-market policies and initiatives should be

⁸ cf. Gajendran & Harrison (2007).

⁹ Bijl (2009, p. 27).

¹⁰ This commission was established to develop recommendations for market policies geared at stimulating more people to participate in the labour market and to improve labour market mobility.

aimed at maximising the use of all potential labour supply in order to maintain economic growth, to fight labour-market shortages (particularly in the education and health-care sectors), to help bear the growing costs associated with the Dutch welfare state, and to prevent the social exclusion of particular groups from the labour market.

The Dutch government has not set explicit targets for women's and men's working hours or the division of paid and unpaid work among spouses. However, the targeted labour market participation rate of 74 percent for women aged 20-64 by 2016 demands actions to stimulate (re)entry to the labour market, to help current workers remain longer in work, and to extend their numbers of working hours. The Dutch government's view is that these objectives can only be achieved by bringing about a cultural shift towards full acceptance of both men and women being able to effectively combine their work and private lives.

In 2008 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment set up a temporary 'Taskforce Part-Time Plus' (2008-2010) with the following key aims:

- to show the urgent need for cultural change;
- to bring about a cultural change regarding working-time preferences; and
- to stimulate flexible working in organisations.

The Taskforce's main focus was to stimulate women (particularly those holding part-time jobs of less than 24 hours per week) to extend their working hours. To facilitate this, the Taskforce started a national dialogue among all labour-market stakeholders (including employers, employees and labour unions), initiated 28 pilots and experiments in organisations, and developed practical instruments, all focusing on the three key aims.

1.3 Institutional agreements and implementation procedures

Customised Working

As of April 2011, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has subsidised an initiative called 'Customised Working' developed by Lof Magazine¹¹ in collaboration with a consultancy company. This initiative aims to stimulate employers to both adopt and foster an organisational culture supporting flexible working and a healthy work-life balance as an integral part of organisational objectives. The initiative uses self-assessment gauges which indicate whether companies are ahead in this regard based on their HR-practices and work-life culture. Employers judged positively are rewarded the quality mark of 'The Modern Employer' and are given 1 to 5 stars, depending on their scores, with 1 being supportive, and 5 being very supportive. A designated 'Modern Employer' (indicated by one or more stars) offers customised working conditions that allow employees achieve a satisfactory work-life balance, supported by the adopted policies and practices. The focus of the quality mark is on all aspects of working-life (flexible working, health, informal care, balance of work and family life, personal development, culture, leave intentions, *etc*). After three years, the rewarded organisations are re-assessed, though annually employers should monitor achievements and, if necessary, further develop their policies and practices.

¹¹ Lof is a cross-media platform for a new generation working parents that aim to combine work and family life. In cooperation with employers, government and politics, Lof aims to make the combination of work and care more accepted.

The award can be used by the organisation for public relations and communication purposes and so it might also be an important incentive for organisations to address human-resource development and gender-equality issues in general. Moreover, it is hoped that the rewarded companies also offer other employers examples of good practices and stimulate or persuade them to follow suit.

To guarantee an independent assessment and the objectivity and reliability of the quality mark, a committee of government representatives, employers and labour unions has been set up. In addition, an interactive website is available for both employers and employees and a digital platform will be installed to provide information about flexible working. A conference called 'Work-Life=Inspiration,' to be held on October 3th 2011 to celebrate the first three flexible companies winning the award. Thereafter, other companies of any size can register for the assessment.

Preliminary research has shown that there is a lot of interest in the initiative, both among individual employers and social partners. The target is to award the mark to more than 1,000 organisations over the next three years. The ultimate aim is that the award will become a 'must have' for companies.

Working carer policies

The approach to 'Customised Working' presented above is similar to that of the 'Work & Informal Care'¹² initiative established in 2007. The Dutch network organisation 'Work & Informal Care' encourages companies to adopt work-life initiatives supporting working carers and to foster a supporting work-life culture. At the core of the network (subsidised by the national government) is the Dutch national association for carers and voluntary help, working with a consultancy firm¹³. The network's participants (the national government, labour unions, local-care organisations supporting informal carers, and private companies) have committed themselves to stimulate the adoption of company initiatives to support the needs of working carers, which is in concert with the adoption of working carer policies in organisations encouraged at the European level¹⁴.

Taskforce Mobility

Aside from labour-market factors (e.g., work-life balance and gender equality), other factors, such as the need to control costs, mobility and environmental issues, have been driving the adoption of flexible work-practices in the Netherlands. In 2007, the social partners, local governments and business representatives¹⁵ united in the temporary 'Taskforce Mobility Management' initiative. Not only were covenants between the national and local governments introduced to reduce traffic congestion by at least 5%, which should also lead to a reduction of CO² emissions¹⁶, the Taskforce Mobility Management also provided a platform to coordinate, support, stimulate and professionalise new initiatives regarding mobility, including the promotion of flexible working¹⁷. In the current discussions, flexible working is viewed a 'win-win' strategy for organisations, employees and society at large because flexible working is also expected to lead to reduced overhead costs due to the efficient use of resources, such

¹² Werk&Mantelzorg.

¹³ www.mezzo.nl; www.werkenmantelzorg.nl

¹⁴ Eurofound (2010).

¹⁵ e.g., KPN, Rabobank Netherlands, ANWB.

¹⁶ VNG (2008).

¹⁷ De Waal (2011).

as time, energy and buildings, and, for example, to lower absenteeism, increased employee job-satisfaction and better work-life balance¹⁸.

Evaluation of the activities of the Taskforce Mobility Management revealed that changing employer and employee behaviour needs more time. Furthermore, the implementation of flexible working demands more knowledge regarding particular implementation strategies, addressing themes such as HRM, IT, Facility Management, Behavioural Change (Culture) and Mobility. The decision to implement flexible working also calls for more 'business case' evidence to convince other organisations to follow the example of those pioneering the approach. In order to meet these demands, as of March 15th 2011, the activities of the Taskforce Mobility Management have been continued by the platform 'Smart Working Smart Commuting'¹⁹ in order to further develop, support and upscale emerging employer initiatives regarding flexible working.

The current Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment expects that the commitment of the 50 private organisations (the so-called B50) and social partners in this new initiative of public-private governance will lead to a structural change regarding traffic mobility in 2011-2012, with a target of one million teleworkers in 2012, encouraged by a 10 million euro subsidy. Related to this, local initiatives supported by provinces and municipalities promote new ways to work by giving (free) information, advice and financial support to companies to introduce more flexible working and setting out their mobility plans²⁰.

The former Taskforce Mobility Management also stimulated social partners to include teleworking in Collective Labour Agreements (CLAs)²¹. A report by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment²² showed that in 2009, 22% of the CLA's under study mentioned telework arrangements. The percentage of employees covered by CLA's that included telework arrangements had gone up from 6% in 2007 to 15% in 2009. However, the number of CLA's covering with telework is still rather limited. This may be attributed to telework often being used informally. It may also be the case that companies develop telework policies at the company level rather than in wider CLA's.

Most CLA's addressing telework tend to mention only that teleworking can be negotiated for by employees with their employers, and that the detailed regulations should be negotiated with the works council at the company level. The sectoral CLA's, therefore, should be viewed as signals to employers to address telework in their policies.²³ Most of the CLA's covering teleworking are in the public sector or non-governmental organisations where there is encouragement at national and local levels to introduce formal telework policies. In 2001, a Framework Agreement Telework was

¹⁸ Lutje Schipholt (2008).

¹⁹ 'Slim Werken Slim Reizen (<http://www.slimwerkenslimreizen.nl/>).

²⁰ cf. VNM (2011).

²¹ In 2002, the European Social Partners, on invitation of the European Commission, signed a general Framework Agreement on Telework. Instead of using a directive, a more voluntary and persuasive strategy was chosen to stimulate its implementation. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to implement the Framework Agreement on a national level. On September 11th 2003, the Dutch Labour Foundation, a bipartite consulting council, published a recommendation about telework. This recommendation only provided employers with general knowledge, for example, regarding potential advantages and risks associated with teleworking, and examples of Collective Labour Agreements and written organisational policies addressing telework. In fact, this document gave Dutch social partners, employers and employees all discretionary power to decide whether or not to adopt teleworking, either through a Collective Labour Agreement, a company policy, or an individual employee contract. Consequently, flexible working increasingly plays a role in negotiations regarding working conditions, at the national, sector and organisational levels. Moreover, Dutch politicians, central employer organisations and trade-union federations have started to present flexible working (teleworking) as a means to solve contemporary societal problems. (cf. Gabaglio (2002); Visser & Ramos Martin (2008)).

²² Beekma & Junger-Van Hoorn (2010).

²³ Examples of CLA's including telework are presented at <http://docs.minszw.nl>.

introduced for civil servants²⁴ and additionally, multiple websites have been developed to provide municipalities and companies with information and examples of best practice in teleworking^{25 26}.

2. Results of the good practice and its impact on achieving gender equality

2.1. Key results in relation to the baseline situation and to the goals and target groups

Part-time work/women's working hours

In the Netherlands, the proportion of working women aged 15-64 (working at least one hour per week in the labour market) increased from 29% in 1975 to 68% in 2006²⁷ and by 2010 it was 72%. Using a much narrower definition of working (12 hours or more per week) women's labour-market participation in 2010 was 60% which meant that the target figure of 65% in 2010, set by the Dutch government in 2007, was not achieved²⁸. Moreover, a large majority of working women (74%) worked less than 35 hours, often by choice. Influenced by the strong Dutch 'motherhood ideology', female part-timers often hold small part-time jobs while male part-timers tend to hold larger part-time jobs. Yet, the trend (in line with policy) is for women to increasingly hold larger part-time jobs²⁹. Note, that also among Dutch male workers the percentage of part-timers was comparatively high (at 23%), yet, especially among men under 25.

It is important to note that the financial crisis may have provided an incentive for women to strengthen their labour-market positions, because those sectors such as education and health care where women employees predominate have appeared to be less vulnerable to the economic down turn than male-dominated sectors. Similar to the experience of the 1980s recession (The Wassenaar Agreement (1982)³⁰) the current financial crisis may have encouraged women to remain active in the labour market or to increase their labour-market hours, as a way of maintaining household income in an increasingly difficult labour-market situation³¹.

Flexi-time

A growing number of workers in the Netherlands have control over the structure of their daily working hours. In 2004, around 39% of employees were, to some extent, entitled to determine when they worked during the day compared to 26% in 1994³². However,

²⁴ <http://www.aeno-telewerken.nl/webdocs/raamregeling.pdf>

²⁵ www.aeno-telewerken.nl; <http://www.vng.nl/smartsite.dws?id=61090>

²⁶ <http://www.offensiefbereikbaarheid.nl/hnw/>

²⁷ Portegijs & Keuzenkamp (2008).

²⁸ Merens et al. (2011).

²⁹ Merens et al. (2011).

³⁰ The Wassenaar Agreement (Akkoord van Wassenaar') was an agreement reached in 1982 between employers organisations and labor unions in the Netherlands to restrain wage growth in return for the adoption of policies to combat unemployment and inflation, such as reductions in working hours and the expansion of part-time employment.

³¹ Tijdens (2006); Merens (2009).

³² Fouarge et al. (2006).

according to the TNS-NIPO, by 2010, 35% of the Dutch workers worked flexibly³³ and 75% of these workers had a say in the timing of their working hours (in effect they had flexi-time). Most of the others who did not work flexibly were at the same time not eligible to flexi-time (90% of this group). However, should the opportunity arise, 60% would be inclined to take up flexi-time.

Individual Scheduling

Although not everyone's preferences can be taken into account, this scheduling system is believed to optimise the individual workers' work-life balance³⁴. No figures are available yet to indicate the spread of this flexible work concept, but it is felt to be growing in popularity in sectors where workers who cannot work remotely, particularly in the care sector where labour-market shortages are strongly felt.

Telework

A 2007-study of employees and own-account workers, commissioned by the Dutch labour union FNV³⁵, showed that 32% of Dutch workers worked at home for at least one hour per week, with own-account workers showing much higher percentages than employees. However, applying a narrower definition of telework (the percentage of workers working from home for at least one day per week known as 'substantial telehomeworkers') stood at 14%. Most current teleworkers indicated that they would like to increase their weekly teleworking hours. Moreover, among those respondents who did not work at home in 2007, 12% indicated they would like to do so in the near future indicating that teleworking in the Netherlands has the potential to grow. Interestingly, however, younger employees are often shown to have a preference for office work instead of remote working.

Also in 2010, 32% of workers (including those working for less than 12 hours per week) could be labelled as 'teleworkers' (including telehomeworkers and mobile workers), meaning that they teleworked at least one hour per week³⁶. Although the percentage of teleworkers has not much changed over time, because of the increase in the overall size of the workforce, the total number of teleworkers has increased.

In general, men are given more access to teleworking than women and research has shown that teleworking is particularly used by highly educated men (either married or cohabiting) with children, and long commuting hours to work. These results tend to suggest that teleworkers have demanding yet interesting work, with a high degree of control over their work. Employees in business services and financial sector organisations were shown to be ahead in the adoption of teleworking. The highest percentage of teleworkers was among employees working in the IT-sector (47%) whereas (not surprisingly given the need to deliver the service to the client) only a relative low percentage (7%) of employees in the health-care sector did some level of teleworking^{37 38}.

³³ Koenen, Vieira & Verhue (2010).

³⁴ Jansen & Baaijens (2011).

³⁵ Beffers & Van den Brink (2008).

³⁶ Smulders, Kraan & Pot (2011).

³⁷ Smulders et al. (2011).

³⁸ Peters & Van der Lippe (2005; 2007a); Peters, Tijdens & Wetzels (2002; 2004).

New Ways to Work (NWW)

Since the definition of New Ways to Work is very broad, it is difficult to provide figures on the adoption of this new way of organising work (which goes beyond the other flexible working-styles discussed in this paper). Moreover, each company may introduce NWW under its own label and may design its work systems according to its own interpretation of the term. This can even imply that in some companies which claim to have introduced NWW, teleworking may not be allowed. It is suggested, however, that in the next five years, NWW will be introduced in a large majority of Dutch public and private organisations³⁹ though many of these organisations only plan to introduce some elements of the NWW- concept, or to apply it to just some employee categories (e.g., knowledge workers).

2.2. Challenges, obstacles and constraints encountered

Part-time work/women's working hours

Despite the growing interest in flexible working, according to research most women still prefer part-time work⁴⁰. This may be because in general part-time workers tend to experience less work-home conflict than full-time workers⁴¹, though only in cases where the work load of part-timers is reduced accordingly.

Despite the relative high labour-market participation rate and the possibilities to combine work and private life, most women in the Netherlands are not economically independent, although those women claiming to have financial independence has increased from 44% in 2006 to 48% in 2009.

In the Dutch context, a distinction can be made between a 'new' labour-market category of part-timers working four days per week and a category of part-timers working no more than three days per week. However, the former category is no longer exclusively female and is has generally improved in terms of labour-market perceptions and career consequences. However, for those working no more than three days per week, this is still exclusively associated with working mothers and continues to suffer from negative labour-market connotations⁴². Much of these perceptions are due to stereotypical views on part-time working and career ambition⁴³. Although in general men are not shown to be more ambitious than women⁴⁴, part-time working women are often regarded as less ambitious than full-timers. To overcome these deep-seated views, employers need to change their attitudes to part-time workers in terms of their career aspirations.

Flexi-time

Flexibility and being able to exercise some control over work (job autonomy) are key factors persuading women to work full time⁴⁵. A cultural shift is needed that places less importance on hours of attendance in the workplace, towards a more results-oriented

³⁹ Deloitte (2010).

⁴⁰ Merens et al. (2011).

⁴¹ Peters et al. (2009).

⁴² Mescher (2011).

⁴³ Peters, Bleijenbergh, Pas & Gremmen (2010).

⁴⁴ Visser et al. (2009) conducted in commission of the Taskforce DeeltijdPlus.

⁴⁵ Keuzenkamp & Faulk (2006).

approach. Flexible working allows women employees to increase their contractual working hours, to develop their career potential, and to stimulate their upward mobility. This in turn would allow employers to make optimal use of the human resources represented by the women they employ.

Flexibility in working time is shown to affect women differently than men⁴⁶. Flexi-time in particular appeared to be a 'win-win' arrangement for employers and women employees. It not only improved women's work-life balance (less strain from work and less time-based conflict), but also committed women to work overtime without negatively affecting their work-home balance, with overtime taken an indicator for having more time available for meeting deadlines and so contributing to career progression. By contrast, flexi-time did not tend to reduce men's work-home conflict and this may be because women's work-life balance may derive more benefit for flexi-time because they tend to do more tasks with potential conflict such as taking children to/from school or leisure activities.

Individual scheduling

The somewhat limited data available regarding individual scheduling showed employees to be generally satisfied with this flexible work practice, partly due to the better work-life balance outcomes from it. Also, employers tended to gain higher efficiency and flexibility from this practice. On average, in 70-80% of the cases, employees' preferences are realised, though the risk is that if this percentage is lower, then employees' dissatisfaction with the system is likely to grow. Moreover, the new system demands a high level of trust and readiness of employees to take responsibility for the work-scheduling process⁴⁷.

Telework

International case- and panel-studies showed telehomeworkers to be more satisfied with their work-life balance⁴⁸. However, in Dutch cross-sectional studies, teleworking is associated with more work-home conflict⁴⁹, particularly amongst men. However, substantial teleworking (one day per week or more) was shown to have the potential to reduce women's feelings of time pressure, but only if this is accompanied by a reduction in work-home conflict. This approach requires employers and employees to develop 'counter strategies' by actively setting (new) boundaries between work and private life.

Telework outcomes are likely to depend on the implementation conditions. Job autonomy and 'temporal' flexibility (i.e., the possibility of employees to choose to work atypical hours) is needed to improve outcomes of flexibility⁵⁰.

New Ways to Work

NWW at Rabobank Netherlands (Unplugged Working)⁵¹ was associated with better work-life balance. Generally, however, employees in *job categories* characterised by

⁴⁶ Peters, Den Dulk & Van der Lippe (2009).

⁴⁷ Jansen & Baaijens (2011).

⁴⁸ Collins (2005); Duxbury et al. (1998); Madson (2003).

⁴⁹ Smulders et al., (2011); Peters & Van der Lippe (2007).

⁵⁰ Peters & Wildenbeest (2010).

⁵¹ De Groot & De Rouw (2011).

high levels of job autonomy, accountability, targets and deadlines experienced more work-home conflict⁵². Yet, employees' *own perceptions* of working time control (flexi-time and part-time work) was associated with less work-home conflict.

Customised support for working carers

Flexible and customised company support was shown to be essential to improve working carers' work-life balance and to prevent them from leaving the labour market. The adoption of working carer support, including flexible working, is not only driven by Corporate Social Responsibility, but also by business-case arguments⁵³.

3. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the good practice

Flexible working is a multi-faceted concept, comprising many different work arrangements (in this paper, part-time work; flexi-time; individual scheduling, teleworking and New Ways to Work). In the public debate in the Netherlands, these types of flexible work arrangements are expected to enhance women's labour market participation, (both men's and women's) work-life balance, and gender equality in the workplace and at home. Since the 1980s, the gradual acceptance of (voluntary) part-time work has led to an increase in the labour market participation of women and in the past years, working women's average labour-market hours have stepped up slightly towards 25 hours per week. More recently, women working in larger part-time jobs are suffering less career penalties, though women holding smaller part-time jobs may still be labelled as being less ambitious and so not given equal labour-market opportunities.

From a policy perspective, however, part-time working is no longer viewed as the best strategy to solve current labour-market problems. With the prospects of future general labour-market problems and labour shortages in the care sector, coupled with mobility and environmental issues, there is a growing demand for organisational and employee flexibility, as well as a demand for more innovative cost-reduction strategies. Under this scenario, other forms of flexible working have gathered favour.

This discussion paper has demonstrated that employers and employees need both regulations and initiatives at higher levels and customisation at lower levels for the development of flexible working and the associated work-life culture change. In cooperation with other stakeholders, the Dutch government has set up various Taskforces and subsidised initiatives aimed at stimulating and supporting employers to include flexible working (currently promoted under the heading of New Forms of Working) in their HR-systems.

Various studies have shown that women in particular have gained from flexible working arrangements, with flexi-time and substantial tele(home)working allowing women to have a better work-life balance. At the same time, these initiatives have enabled women to work longer hours, and improve their labour-market opportunities as a result. However, until recently not all employee categories have been given equal access to flexible working. For example, women were less likely to be given access to flexibility (and to take up the option) than men. Also younger and lower educated employees

⁵² Peters, Den Dulk & Van der Lippe (2009).

⁵³ Eurofound (2010); Woning (2010).

were given less access to flexibility than more senior and higher educated workers in challenging and demanding jobs.

It should be noted, however, that flexible working is often not driven by issues such as increased freedom for women. In fact, flexible work environments are often very demanding and may lead to involuntary flexible working, overtime, work-home conflict, unpredictable working hours, permanent accessibility, time competition, job insecurity, or health issues. In view of women's traditional care roles, women might not feel comfortable in such environments and may even leave the organisation⁵⁴. Initiatives such as 'Customised Working' are, therefore, highly important, particularly when they aim to monitor the gendered effects of flexible working and stimulate organisations to take gender issues into account and improve their policies and practices in this regard. However, whether organisations are responsive to this persuasive approach is not known yet.

4. Main questions and issues for debate at the meeting

Despite the seemingly close fit between the Dutch national culture and the culture associated with flexible working, adoption of flexible working practices in the Netherlands has been slow. Since the 1980s/1990s, flexibility has been on the Dutch social and political agendas, driven by a range of factors (such as reducing costs, environmental issues, labour-market issues, work-life balance issues). However, the significant amount of attention in Dutch society given to flexible working recently is of itself remarkable. The combination of current economic, demographic, cultural, political and technological trends have provided a timely opportunity in the Netherlands for multiple stakeholders with an interest in the issue, to place flexible working firmly back on the agenda.

The cultural shift associated with these new employment relationships, such as mutual flexibility and trust, still requires more time, financial support, and ongoing attention from policy makers inside and outside employers if its full potential regarding gender equality is to be realised. As a result, adoption, acceptance and effective use of flexible working demands a contextual analysis, customisation, and thorough empirical investigation. Labour market and institutional conditions may pose constraints on directly translating the flexible working initiatives and practices to organisations situated in other national contexts and listed below are possible questions for further debate among peer countries:

- What are the *societal prerequisite* needed to launch initiatives such as 'Customised working' (in terms of labour-market legislation, reconciliation measures, social dialogue, work culture, gender equality sensitivity...)?
- What should be the *role of the different actors* (government, social partners, employers, employees, other parties) in promoting and implementing flexible working policies stimulating gender equality?
- Flexible working simply imposed on workers may not be inherently favourable either for the employees, or for the work life balance, or for gender equality. How can any *potential risk* arising from the introduction of flexibility be addressed in current (labour-market) policies and practices? Moreover, the effects of flexible

⁵⁴ Van Echtelt et al. (2009).

working may not be equal for all workers (e.g., men versus women; higher educated versus lower educated; younger versus older workers). How should *those dimensions* be included in the current flexible working policies and practices in order to prevent unintended side-effects?

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