

**THE EFFECT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE  
AT HEALTH CARE ALLIANCE (HCA),  
IRELAND DURING TURBULENT TIMES.**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

Globalisation has significantly increased the world economy's level of technological advancement, thus leading to competition locally and internationally. In recent times, organisations have been espoused by competition and ability to retain talent, however, researchers emphasised on the importance of Work-life Balance (WLB) on attracting, retention of individuals to achieve organisational objectives.

In the recent times of economic slowdown and intense competition, the ability of an organisation to develop and maintain talented human resources has become a source of competitive advantage. Simultaneously, organisations realised the fact that, emphasis on employee development and well-being will not only improve employee performance but also help in enhancing overall organisational performance.

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this book to the Almighty God, to my dear husband Dr Kayode Johnson, children, Jesutofunmi, Jesutomisin, Jesulayomi Johnson and to my sisters and brother in laws, and every individual who have inspired me to continue in the study

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **GLOSSARY**

<b>Health Care Alliance</b>	<b>HCA</b>
<b>Health Service Executive</b>	<b>HSE</b>
<b>Work-life Balance</b>	<b>WLB</b>
<b>Strategic Human Resource Management</b>	<b>SHRM</b>
<b>European Union</b>	<b>EU</b>
<b>Chartered Institute of Personnel management</b>	<b>CIPD</b>
<b>National recovery Plan</b>	<b>NRP</b>

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction to the research study**

In Ireland, the Irish Employment Law (along with EU Employment Laws) strives to provide effective work-life balance for all the employees across various organisations equally through imposing strict regulations on working hours, working patterns and other working practices (Grady, 2008) However, with the on-going recession and adverse economic conditions there have been severe cuts in the budgets of public sector organisations like HCA This result in the considerable changes in the way organisational practices (mainly work-life balance practices) are managed but may also significantly impact the employees' work and personal life balance With a motive to reduce operational costs there might be increase in the workloads and work intensity which may in-turn result in stressful conditions, work pressures, job insecurity and mental disturbances for the employees (HR Review, 2011) The research study is namely, The Effect of Work-Life Balance (WLB) at Health Care Alliance (HCA), Ireland during turbulent times

Also, it is noted that the Irish social and economic context has changed considerably in recent years In particular, while the Irish economy was burdened with mass unemployment and poor performance during the 1980s, there has since been very strong economic growth The expansion of the economy has resulted in continual employment growth and a substantial reduction in unemployment - from 12% in 1996 to 4.3% in August 2000 (CSO)

### Economic background Of Ireland

	Ireland	EU27
GDP per capita (in purchasing power standards, index: EU27=100)	150.4 (2007) 139.8 (2008)	100
Real GDP growth (% change on previous year) (annual average 2004–2007)	5.7%	2.63%
Inflation rate (annual average 2004–2007)	2.52%	2.18%
Average monthly labour costs, in € (2005)	No data	€2,981
Gross annual earnings, in € (2005)	€40,462	€28,992
Gender pay gap (Difference between average earnings of male and female employees as a percentage of earnings of male employees, 2007)	17.1%	n.a.
Employment rate (15–64 years) (2007)	69.1%	65.4%
Female employment rate (15–64 years) (2007)	60.6%	58.3%
Unemployment rate (15–64 years) (2007)	4.6%	7.1%
Monthly minimum wage (2008)	€1,461	n.a.

Sources adapted from Eurofound website.

An important feature of this employment growth has been the considerable increase in the number of women entering the labour force, particularly in the expanding service sectors. In 1999, 47% of women of working age were in the labour force.

The pressure generated by strong economic growth has meant, however, that many workers are finding it increasingly stressful to reconcile the conflicting demands that exist inside and

outside the workplace Inside the workplace, the pressure to work longer hours, the need to cope with new work practices, and higher customer expectations, have placed increased stress on many workers

In the last three decades, there is great emphasis on the development and implementation of effective work-life balance (WLB) practices within the workplace environment as it enables organisations to attract, encourage and retain talented workforce and motivate individuals to achieve organisational goals and objectives through allowing them to find right balance between their work and personal life (Clutterbuck, 2004)

It has become an important aspect of Human Resource Management (HRM) policies of every organisation, irrespective of private or public or non-profit sectors and determines the fact that the organisations which focus on employee development and well-being will not only achieve enhanced employee performance levels but also improves overall performance of the organisation(Broers,2005) Mainly with increase in the economic uncertainty, severe budget cuts (in public sector organisations) and intense competition the development and retention of talented workforce through implementation of effective HRM policies such as work-life balance practices may provide competitive advantage for the organisations in the highly complex and challenging business environment (Nathani, 2010))

The rapid changes in the business environment since mid-1990s resulted in considerable changes to the working patterns and demands of an organisation which not only initiated high work intensity and work pressures for the individuals but also created serious imbalances between their work and personal life activities (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007) Furthermore, the intense pressure to achieve tight work targets and inability to manage evolving needs making it tough for individuals to strike right balance between work and non-work life On the other hand, technological advancement and reforms in social life resulted in greater

changes in the work-life activities of the individuals, but the desire to attain those technological comforts and quality life making them to work longer hours resulting in serious imbalances between work and personal life activities. So, this indicates the need to develop and implement effective work-life balance practices in an organisation which not only balances individuals' work and personal life objectives but also enhances both the employee and organisational performance.

However, on contrary Burke and Cooper (2010) indicates that organisations sometimes downplay the significance of work-life balance practices, especially during the turbulent times such as economic slowdown and degrading performance. For instance, the studies conducted by CIPD (2011) suggest that the recent economic slowdown in different countries have created serious impact in the way work-life balance practices are implemented within the workplace context and organisations in the Ireland (both private and public sectors) are no exception to this phenomenon. Mainly, budget cuts in the public sector organisations, like HCA, with an objective to reduce operational costs and expenses have not only created significant impact on the employees' work-life balance but also overall morale of the workforce (HSE intranet). Although, HCA may benefit from the budget cuts in the short term but impact on employee commitment and motivation may affect their productivity and may result in high attrition rates in the long term resulting in loss of talented workforce. Hence, this research study focus on the analysis of employees' work-life balance practices at HCA in the current economic slowdown and strives to understand its importance in enhancing employees' performance levels and thus overall organisation's service standards. The primary reason for selecting public organisation like (HCA) is due to its eminent exposure to recent economic crisis which enforced governments to implement significant

changes in the work-life activities of the individuals, but the desire to attain those technological comforts and quality life making them to work longer hours resulting in serious imbalances between work and personal life activities. So, this indicates the need to develop and implement effective work-life balance practices in an organisation which not only balances individuals' work and personal life objectives but also enhances both the employee and organisational performance.

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budget cuts and financial constraints impacting both employees' work-life balance and the way organisation manage its work-life balance practices

Furthermore, given the significant role of the HCA in the Ireland labour market, it makes a suitable organisation for conducting the present research study and to critically analyse the effect of employees' work-life balance in the on-going economic turbulence

## **1.2 Organisation Context**

*“Overall health spending is to be reduced by €750 million in the year ahead, which HCA chief executive Cathal Magee acknowledged would affect frontline services for patients and working staff The HCA has sought to mitigate the effect of the cuts by putting in place new efficiency measures and work practice changes However, the effects of budget cuts and scaling back in staffing levels will be felt across the board ” (HSE intranet 2012)*

This research on analysis of work-life balance practices during economic slowdown is carried out at HCA Ireland, which is primarily responsible for facilitating health and personal care services to all the people living in the country

HCA, was established in January 2005, is responsible for the delivery of health and social care services in Ireland Prior to its establishment, services were delivered through a complex structure of ten regional health boards, the Eastern Regional Health Authority and a number of other different agencies As a result of further restructuring in October 2010, the Integrated Service Directorate (ISD) of the HCA incorporates the previously separate directorate of Primary, Community and Continuing Care (PCCC) and the National Hospitals Office (NHO) Four regional directors of operation (Dublin Mid-East, Dublin North-East, West and South) are responsible for the provision of health and social services in many areas Many services

were provided directly (e.g. district nurses and public nursing homes), while others are provided under contract with the HCA by self-employed health professional, private health services providers, voluntary hospitals and voluntary/community organisations. Many other advisory agencies and voluntary organisations under the authority of HCA play a role in service delivery, regulation and development in the health system, e.g. An Bord Altranais (the nursing board) is responsible for the regulation of the nursing profession in Ireland.

The HCA is the largest employer in the state, employing nearly 110,000 staff in 2009, and its budget of €15.1 billion in 2009 is the largest of any public sector organisation in Ireland. As at January 2012, HCA employs 104,175 whole time employees with highest pay cuts of €145 million high level review of expenditure control systems (see end notes on organisation).

Programme	2006	2007	2008	2009
National Hospitals Office	4,585	5,088	5,332	5,380
Primary Care & Continuing Care (PCCC)	7,045	7,880	8,492	8,531
Population Health	69	82	95	197
Corporate and Shared Services	613	667	759	934
Health Repayment Scheme	-	120	236	79
<b>Gross HCA Expenditure</b>	<b>12,312</b>	<b>13,837</b>	<b>14,915</b>	<b>15,122</b>

HCA Expenditure by Directorate 2006-2009 (€ million)

**Source: A. Brick, A. Nolan, J O'Reilly and S. Smith, Resource Allocation, Financing and Sustainability in Health Care: Evidence for the expert group on Resource Allocation and Financing in Health Sector Dublin 2010**

### **1.3 Delivery of Health Care Alliance in Ireland**

While the state is heavily involved in the financing of health services in Ireland, it mainly leaves the delivery of health services to the private sector, with the hospital and primary care sectors providing particularly good examples of the intermix between the public and private sector in financing and delivery of health services in Ireland. The Irish health sector therefore has a mixture of a universal public health services and fee based private system. The complex mixture had implications for the allocation of resources, both between the public and private sector and between different types of care (HCA Intranet 2012)

### **1.4 Proposals for Health Care Reform in Irish Health Service (NRP 2011-2014).**

The National Recovery Plan 2011-2014 and Government for National Recovery documents provide some details on the proposed future direction of the Irish Health Service. Any further development need to be seen in the context of the substantial reduction in public health expenditure of 8 percent over the period 2011-2014 that is required under the terms of National Recovery Plan. One of the most significant changes proposed by the new coalition government is the abolition of the HCA.

### **1.5 Research Aims and Objectives**

The main aim of the study is to critically analyse the effect of on-going economic crisis on the employees' work-life balance practices at Health Service Executive, Ireland. In order to achieve the research aim, the study focuses on the achievement of the following research objectives

- To explore the current work-life balance practices followed at HCA with a focus on Clerical Officers and health advisors
- To understand work life balance of employees during ongoing recession and examine the extent to which effective work-life balance practices will result in greater employee performance
- To evaluate employee satisfaction towards the current work-life balance practices at HCA
- To present appropriate recommendations to improve work-life balance strategies of an organisation in order to overcome any potential drawbacks in the current work-life balance practices at HCA

Also, the study aims to address the following research questions through collaborating research findings with the different concepts, theories and studies of work-life balance which are discussed in the literature review

### **1.6 The Research Questions are**

- What is the impact of organisation's work-life balance practices on its employees' performance and their commitment to the attainment of organisational goals and objectives?
- Will organisations' work-life balance practices address the employees' needs during turbulent times and are they aligned towards interests of the organisation or that of employees?
- What is the effect on employees' work and personal life activities due to any changes in the policies of an organisation at the times of economic turbulence?

## **Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation is broadly categorised into five different chapters which include Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Findings and Analysis, and Conclusions and recommendation

### **Chapter One**

This presents the introduction to the research study explaining background and its research significance. It is followed by the profile of the organisation where research is conducted and finally outlines research aims and objectives along with the structure of the dissertation.

### **Chapter Two**

The second chapter entails the literature review of the dissertation discussing different theories, concepts and studies of work life balance within an organisational context.

### **Chapter Three**

The third chapter presents research methodology adopted for conducting research study through determining the introduction, research aims, objectives, questions, and quantitative vs qualitative research, research strategy and methods, advantages of survey research, research philosophy and research ethics.

### **Chapter Four**

This presents the research findings obtained through research methods and provides a detailed analysis of the findings through linking with the concepts and theories discussed in the literature review chapter. In this chapter the data collected from primary research involving semi-structured interviews is analysed and integrated with the literature review with an

objective to address research questions and to achieve the aims and objectives of the research study

## Chapter Five

In the final chapter suitable recommendations and conclusions for the research study are derived from the potential limitations identified in the work life balance practices of the organisation followed by the conclusion for the dissertation. Furthermore, the drawbacks of the study and further scope for future study are discussed.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Overview**

This chapter provides literature review of the study discussing various concepts and theories on the topic of work-life balance practices and its importance in an organisational context. This chapter begins with section (2.1) introducing the topic along with definitions and followed by section (2.2) various perspectives of work life balance such as Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) view, section (2.3) employee & employer views and legal perspective mainly with regards to the turbulent times such as economic slowdown and financial crisis. It outlines various studies and theories indicating the impact of recession on employees' work-life balance practices through discussing factors like flexible working conditions, increased absenteeism, changes in the working patterns and loss of talented workforce. Finally, Section (2.4) explains, how the presence of effective communication system and workplace culture will improve work life balance of the employees and their relationship with the employers is discussed.

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Traditionally, the term 'work-life balance' was first introduced in the mid-1980s during the active prominence of the Irish's industrial relations outlining the significance of balance between employees' work and personal life activities, Dobbins (2008). Later, with the inclusion of Ireland into European Union (EU) the development and implementation of work-life balance practices, for example the Irish parental leave was introduced in 1998, in response to 1995 EU Directive on Parental leave. According to Pillinger (2001), Work life

Balance is has attracted the attention of EU, stating its significance as central to the quality of life, employment rates, competition and growth. In the 1980's, civil service was amongst the first organisation to introduce WLB. This shows significant influence on the social partnership, people management, business functions and policy making of the companies, mainly which conduct operations both at national and EU level (Grady, 2008). In addition to this, the changes in the workforce demographics, demographics, working patterns and conditions, increase in the ageing population and technological innovation enforced Irish organisations to develop policies which are employee friendly and flexible to work, so that individuals can effectively balance their both work and non-work roles.

Initially, work-life balance practices are seen as a part of family-friendly policies which are mainly started with an objective to provide flexibility in the working hours of the employees so that they can not only balance their work and personal life activities effectively but also to enhance employee motivation and engagement towards organisational goals and objectives. Steven & Paula (2008), O'Driscoll et al (2004). However, with changes in the workforce demographics and working conditions different flexible working patterns have evolved which include voluntary working times, annualised working hours, e-working, teleworking, work from home, contract hours, job sharing, zero hours contract, part time working, study and career breaks, flexitime and compressed hours. These practices are not only aimed at providing great flexibility in the working conditions for employees but also enable them to achieve organisational goals and objectives with great commitment and engagement (Stredwick and Ellis, 2005).

Moreover, with rapid change in the business environment there are considerably, change to working demands, work patterns in organisations which has resulted in serious work pressures and work intensity for the employees Grady (2008). Furthermore, the pressure to

focus on the achievement of stringent work targets and inability to manage employees' evolving needs makes it tough for employees to balance their work and non-work life, attenuating competitive advantage and reducing overall profitability of an organisation (Torrington et al, 2007) Although the reforms in the social living and technological advancement has resulted in a fast paced working environment, but increase in cost of living standards, with low quality of life makes employees to work intensively to achieve their desired objectives For instance, when compared to previous decades, the technological change and social reforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might have reduced work intensity to a greater extent, but the evolving needs of the individuals to obtain those technological comforts and improved quality of the life making them to work longer hours (or sometimes more than one job), which is often resulting serious imbalance between individuals' work and non-work roles (Clutterbuck, 2004)

Gregory and Milner (2009) indicate that the work-life balance is a two way process It involves the interest of both employees and well as the employers It is imperative for employees to balance their work and personal life roles effectively, as it not only help them to remain focus on the workplace objectives but also fulfil their personal life contributions Steven & Paula (2008) On the other contrary, it is essential for organisations to emphasize the development and implementation of effective work-life balance practices to enhance organisational effectiveness through closely aligning the needs of the organisation to those of employees' evolving needs (Sparrow and Cooper, 2003) For instance, the increase in the competition between the companies to improve operational efficiency has forced employers to develop working patterns which are not only resulting in high work intensity but also heavy work pressures for the employees As a result of this, it has become extremely difficult for employees to balance their work responsibilities and personal life roles simultaneously,

thus impacting employee commitment and performance (Redman and Wilkinson, 2009) This suggest the need to develop and implement work-life balance practices which will reduce conflicts between employees' work and personal life requirements thus leading to improvement in both employee and organisational performance

## **2.2 Definition of the term 'Work-Life Balance'**

The term 'work-life balance' has been defined in various ways by different authors and academics Although the concept of work life balance is not unique per se, there have been considerable developments or improvements in this area which are mainly fuelled by the changes in workforce demographics, working demands and working patterns (Brough et al, 2008) Additionally, increase in female employment, rise in living standards, improvements in education, technological advancement and increase in life expectancy has further led to increase in the demand for inclusion of work-life balance practices within an organisation context At the same time, these changes have driven the organisations to implement policies which help meet the needs of both organisations and its employees So, based on this Clark, (2000) defines work life balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum role of conflict"

The concept of work-life balance is not new but there have been considerable developments in the area outlining the importance of work-life balance within the organisational context Mainly, factors like changes in the workforce demographics, working patterns, improved education facilities, increase in the women employment, technological innovation and increase in the aging population have significant influence on the way work-life balance practices are developed and implemented, so that needs of both organisation and employees are met respectively (Brough et al, 2008)

Clutterbuck (2004) defines work-life balance as “a state where an individual manages real or potential conflict between demands on his or her time and energy in a way that satisfies his or her needs for well-being and self-fulfilment” (Clutterbuck, 2004 pp 8) Where he indicates the term ‘work’ to the time and energy people contract to expend to a third party in return of defined reward and ‘life’ as the opportunity to achieve in a diverse range of contexts and ‘balance’ as sense of equity or reasonableness” (Clutterbuck, 2004 pp 8) This suggests the significance of work-life balance policies in an organisation for not only enabling flexible working patterns but also in enhancing employee performance and productivity respectively

While, Dundas 2007 7 defined work life balance as the effective management of work and personal life activities, Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) defined work life balance as the extent to which individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her role e.g work and family Literature revealed that unbalanced work and family life can negatively impact on satisfaction between work and family role (Broers, 2008)

### **2.3 Irish Legislation that promotes WLB.**

During the economic boom, employers came to term with the rising need to attract and retain best talent, however, with the inclusion of Ireland into EU the development and implementation of work-life balance practices, aimed creating flexibility in working practices which allows significant range of people to enter labour force (Robbins 2000) For example the Irish parental leave was introduced in 1998, in response to 1995 EU Directive on Parental leave and many more statutory instrument mentioned below

- ❖ Protection of Employees (Part time work) Act 2001
- ❖ Organisation of working time Act 1997 & 2001
- ❖ Maternity Protection Act 1994 & Maternity protection (Amendment) Act 2004

❖ Adoptive Parents leave Act 1995 & Adoptive leave Act 2005

❖ Carer's leave Act 2001

### 2.3 (1) Protection of Employees (Part time Work) Act 2001

Under the protection of Employees Act, every employee who works part time in Ireland is legislatively protected in law through this Act. This law ensures that every employee working full time or part time are not less treated except there is a reasonable reason which has to be proven. In the Irish context, an employee who works on part time basis under this Act works less than normal hours of employee, who is comparable to other employee in relation Grady et al (2008)

### 2.3 (2) Organisation Working Time Act 1997

This Act explains the obligations an employer has in relation to working hours, holidays, however this Act is not expected to affect the manner in which they are treated when compared to full time staff

### 2.3 (3) Maternity Leave 1994

The Maternity Protection Act 1994 & Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 (MPA), entitles a pregnant employee to avail to 26 consecutive weeks leave, with option of additional 16 weeks unpaid leave. Under this MP Act, a pregnant employee does not have automatic rights to receive payment or add to social welfare maternity benefit payment. However, time for work are with no loss of pay as well as returning back to work with same employer under terms and conditions that are not treated as less favourable than a full time employee

### 2.3 (4) Parental Leave

In Ireland, parents are given the opportunity to take leave from employment for parenting purpose. The parental leave Act 1998, as amended by the Parental Leave (Amendment) Act

2006, also includes a person acting in *loco parentis*. The purpose of this Act is to enable parents to take care and spend more time with their children. Parental leave must be taken in a continuous period of 14 weeks or with organisations agreement in separate block. Under this Act employees are entitled to return to their job after the leave.

### 2.3 (5) Force Majeure Leave

This Act came under the Parental Leave Act 1998, as amended in 2006, give an employee rights to leave work in emergency cases.

### 2.3 (6) Adoptive Parents leave

This Act came into effect in 2005 giving right to adoptive mother avail of leave with exception of a case where the male is the sole adopter. This Act in 2007 under the adoptive leave adds 16 weeks unpaid to adoptive parent. In the health sector, adopting parent are entitled to paid time off for preparation.

### 2.3 (7) Carer's leave

The Carer's leave in Ireland give opportunity to employees in Ireland to leave work on temporal basis for provision of full time care for someone who needs the care and attention. This leave is unpaid but employee's job is guaranteed, unless the employee fulfils continuous service.

## 2.4 A HRM's perspective of Work-life balance

Beardwell and Claydon (2007) indicates that the work life balance practices relates to how individual employees attain effective balance between their work life and personal life and at the same time, this practice is more depended on how effectively the organisation supports its employees in attaining this balance. Over the few decades, the concept of work-life balance

has become highly significant aspect of the Human Resource Management (HRM) policies of the organisation. Many successful organisations have been recognized for their effective work life balance practices and they understand the importance of providing this benefit within the workplace context. For instance, providing work life balance practices such as flexible working, time off requests, compressed working hours, home based working and job sharing help to improve employee motivation and enhances their job performance and commitment (Bunting, 2004)

Drew et al (2003) suggests that work-life balance is an important aspect of HR strategy as it enhances employee motivation and commitment towards organisational goals and objectives. The implementation of effective work-life balance practices are integral to the organisations' HRM policies and play a crucial role in enhancing employee performance, organisational productivity, reduce absenteeism and increase employee commitment. However, with the recent recession, most of the organisations had to adopt strict working hours and less work life balance in order to meet operational efficiency and organisational objectives. Furthermore, many organisations have cut down their costs and reduce the flexible working options which have not only impacted employees' work life balance but overall organisational performance (Burke and Cooper, 2010)

## **2.5 The influence of economic slowdown on the work-life balance practices**

The on-going recession and adverse economic conditions in Ireland and EU region had resulted in increase of employers' negotiation power. According to ILO (2009), the current economic slowdown had great impact on global economies which is mainly due to the integrated business economics, high exposure to activities of multi-national organisations and globalisation. This led to decline in the performance of the companies and decrease in the global output not only created detrimental economic disturbances but also resulted in serious

imbalances of the work and non-work life responsibilities of the global workforce (ILO, 2009) For instance, budget cuts in HCA led to large number of employee lay-offs (in form of early retirement) across the organisation increasing not only work pressure and work intensity to the survivors but also expectations of employers to achieve tough targets Due to this, there has been an increased redundancies, job insecurity and lack of alternative opportunities impacting both work and personal life of the employees (Rutherford, 2011)

Federman's studies (2009) suggest that the slowdown in the economy has shown negative influence on the employees' performance, commitment, engagement and productivity It also indicates that the economic slowdown had great impact on employees' well-being in the form of pay reductions, no bonuses, job insecurity, no career progression and reduction in holidays and break time For instance, CIPD (2010) global study implies that only 30 % of employees were happy with the work-life balance practices within their companies during the economic slowdown outlining negative influence on employees' performance, commitment, engagement and productivity Furthermore, the following effects are analysed across different organisations during recent times of economic turbulence They include

#### 2.5 (1) Loss of talented workforce

There has been large number of lay-offs/ redundancies across various organisations in an attempt to decrease operational costs of the organisation, for example in the HCA, 2010-2011, employees were offered early retirement which a number of talented employees opted for However this action not only led to the loss of talented workforce but also resulted in costs such as compensations, redundant pay and costs involved with identifying new talent (CIPD, 2010) Edwards et al (2003) suggests that with the increase in war for talent attracting and maintaining talented workforce is extremely critical for organisational productivity and

success. Therefore, organisations need to emphasize on providing effective work-life balance practices for sustaining and outperforming during turbulent times.

### 2.5 (2) Increase in Absenteeism

CIPD (2010) survey results indicate that there has been significant increase in the absenteeism fuelled by high work intensity, work pressures and uneven working demands. Due to this, many employees are undergoing great stress and pain impacting both their work and personal life activities. For example, reduction of staff and increase in the operational efficiency enforced organisations to give overtime working and additional stress to employees affecting employees' health and well-being (Wharton and Blair-Loy, 2002).

### 2.5 (3) Telecommuting

As its name suggests telecommuting is a division of flexible work arrangement which gives employees opportunity to carry out work at an off-site location e.g. from home during work hours with the aid of technological telecommunications like video and telephone systems, high speed lines (Galinsky & Johnson, 1998).

The usage of telecommuting methods enabled organisations to save great amount of operational costs and time, mainly during the economic crisis (CIPD, 2010). Mainly, with technological advancement and innovation working from the remote locations became advantageous for both employees and employers. However, on contrary, it is argued that telecommuting creates work environment at home affecting employees' personal life and at the same time it makes difficult for organisations to monitor its employees' performance effectively (Naithani, 2010).

## 2.5 (4) Flexible working conditions

During the on-going recession, some companies were able to use flexible working conditions effectively while others failed to, resulting in low productivity and degraded financial performance (CIPD, 2011). For instance, KPMG provided compressed hours for its employees in a week on a voluntary basis which not only save operational costs but also provided employees with work-life balance. At the same time, it also helped to overcome job redundancies and improve overall organisational productivity. On contrary, some organisations in the public sector failed to adopt flexible working conditions resulting in additional operational and redundant costs (Wain, 2009).

### **2.6 The impact of economic slowdown on work-life balance: An employees' view**

The research carried out by Beardwell and Claydon (2007) indicate that employees are one of the most important stakeholders as they work towards organisational success. So, it is important to develop practices and policies which closely align individual objectives with those of organisational objectives as it enables to enhance employee commitment and engagement towards organisational goals and objectives. For instance, Drew et al (2003) argues that implementation of effective work-life balance practices will maximise employees' personal fulfilment, satisfaction and drive them towards organisational goals and objectives with long term commitment and engagement. However, impact of recession on the employees' work-life balance is highly significant making organisations more focused on the achievement of business objectives. For instance, study conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) suggests that there has been a significant impact on the employees in various sectors during the recent recession which not only resulted in imbalances in their work and non-work roles, but also affected their career prospects (IES, 2010). For example, cuts in Irish public sector organisations has resulted in a large number of lay-offs, increased

working hours and job insecurity affecting employees' work-life balance severely (CIPD, 2010)

Burke and Cooper (2010) suggest that the employees of an organisation are one of the most important stakeholders who work towards achievement of organisational goals and objectives. So, it is highly significant to consider the impact of economic slowdown on employees' evolving needs and develop work-life balance policies which enhance employee motivation and commitment as it not only improves individual's performance but also contributes to overall success of the organisation. Drew et al (2003) indicates that the effectiveness in the work-life balance practices of an organisation will enable employees to manage their work and personal life effectively through providing personal fulfilment and satisfaction and drive them towards organisational goals with greater commitment and engagement. For instance, studies on work-life balance practices within an organisational context indicate a direct relationship between variables like employee performance, motivation and organisational productivity and an effective work-life balance practices will enhance the performance such variables (Chick, 2004, Lockwood, 2007, Romer, 2011)

However, on contrary it is argued that the impact of economic slowdown on employees' work-life balance is critically high with organisations more emphasised on the attainment of organisational objectives in the challenging business environment than satisfying employees' evolving needs (Romer, 2011). For instance, the research study carried out by Institute for Employment Studies (IES) on the influence of recession on employees' work-life balance suggests that irrespective of private and public sectors there has been significant effect on the employees' well-being and work life which not only created serious imbalances in their work and personal life activities but also affected their job performance (IES, 2010). For example, budget cuts by the Irish government in the public sector organisations have resulted

in greater redundancies, increased work intensity, number of working hours and job insecurity affecting employees' work-life balance badly (CIPD, 2010)

## **2.7 The impact of economic slowdown on work-life balance: An employer's view**

According to IES's research study, even during the times of recession majority of the employers supported and implemented their work-life balance practices effectively indicating its importance in organisational strategies (IES, 2010) Fine-Davies et al (2005) suggests that the demand for talented employees and issues related to redundancies enforce organisations to adopt employee friendly policies which help to build and retain talented workforce and to enhance employee performance

In the last two decades, organisations emphasising on the implementation of effective work-life balance practices is significantly high with majority of employers' viewing human resources as an imitable asset and can be a source of competitive advantage in the highly complex and competitive business environment (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007) For instance, the research study conducted by the IES suggests that even during the times of recent economic slowdown most of the employers actively supported and implemented their work-life balance practices determining its significance in their organisational strategies (IES, 2010) In addition to this, the increase in demand for talented workforce and issues concerning redundancies enforce employers to adopt more employee friendly policies which enables them to attract, develop and retain talented employees and motivate them to attain set goals and objectives For example, Corporate Executive Board (2009) carried out an international survey on senior management employees from different companies across the world and the results indicates the fact that the implementation of effective work-life balance practices is the second most important factor considered by the organisations to attract, develop and retain talented employees during the times of recent economic slowdown

However, on contrary, some of the authors argue that the work-life balance practices implemented by the employers (mainly during recession times) are mostly aligned towards the organisational interests rather than those of employees' interests (Burke and Cooper, 2010, Clutterbuck, 2003) For example, the international survey conducted by Corporate Executive Board (2009) outlines the fact that the economic slowdown has forced some companies to reduce their operational costs by cutting down salaries, benefits, bonuses and jobs which not only created serious imbalances in employees' work and personal life roles but also affected their job performance significantly. But at the same time, the survey results suggest that the majority of employers focus on the development and implementation of effective work-life balance practices which enhance employee commitment and engagement and thus improve organisational productivity and efficiency (Corporate Executive Board, 2009). According to CIPD (2010), some of the work-life balance practices which majority of employers were keen to adopt and implement during the times of economic slowdown includes health and pension schemes, job breaks from higher education, job sharing, flexible working conditions and leave plans (which includes paid, voluntary and unpaid leave plans).

## **2.8 Changes in the labour market and its impact on work-life balance practices**

The changes in the labour market in the last few decades has enforced organisations to emphasis on the development of effective work-life balance practices which fits well to the changing needs and enables to attract the best talent in the labour market, Lambert (2005). While McKinsey's *War for talent* (1997) emphasised on the challenges organisations are posed on, in attracting and retaining best talent to suit strategic position, for example SAS, a software company in North Carolina practice a 35-hour work week and offers flexible work arrangement within the workweeks as well.

According to Lockwood (2007), some of notable changes in the last three decades include significant growth in the women employment with improved education and employment facilities. This increase in the women employment, especially participation of mothers and lone parents have resulted in significant changes in the working patterns which enforced organisations to focus on improving work-life balance practices. For instance, according to CIPD (2011) currently 40 percent of the global workforce constitutes female employees with developed countries possessing more than 70 percent female employees and developing countries with 60 percent of female employees in their entire workforce. Furthermore, changes in the workforce demographics and increase in the ageing population further encourages organisation to establish effective work-life balance practices so that best talent can be retained and enhance employee commitment and performance respectively.

Although the existence of work-life balance practices can be traced to mid-1980s in the form of family friendly work but were less significant in the organisational strategies and are mainly limited to promotion of employee well-being and societal life.

However, with the changes in the labour market there have been significant changes in the working patterns and conditions enabling work-life balance practices as an important aspect of organisations' business strategies (Fine-Davis et al, 2004). Today, organisations implement different types of work-life balance practices which are developed on the basis of equitable and beneficial for both employee and employer. For instance, work-life balance schemes like voluntary working times, e-working, teleworking, work from home, contract hours, job sharing, zero hours contract, part time working, study and career breaks, flexitime and compressed hours provide both employees and employers great beneficial (Clutterbuck, 2003).

## **2.9 The role of effective organisational communication in enhancing work-life balance**

Chick (2004) and Lockwood (2007) suggests that the organisations which possess effective communication system can best boost the work-life balance of employees, especially during the turbulent times such as economic slowdown and financial crisis. It also indicates that the organisation with better employee participatory policies and good communication management improve employee participation in organisational activities and makes them feel valued enhancing their commitment and job satisfaction levels. At the same time, effective communication systems enables organisation to evaluate its policies, measure its employee performances and understand their training and development needs (Romer, 2011). The research studies show that a work culture of this kind will develop a positive relationship between employer and employees which will enhance employee commitment and engagement towards organisational goals and objectives even during the times of economic downturn or while undergoing the process of complex organisational changes (Davies, 2007, Pihpsen et al, 2010, Jones et al, 2006)

For instance, Duxbury et al (2002) conducted research study on work-life balance issues by considering research sample taken from 100 medium and large sized companies and the outcomes revealed that only 10 percent of the employees had positive work-life balance while 50 percent had negative work-life balance. Clutterbuck (2003) argues that the nature of the organisation and personal living conditions in which an individual is working show significant influence on their work-life balance. For example, of those who had positive work-life balance were found to be part of companies which highly emphasize on work-life balance policies and at the same time had good support from family, colleagues and peers. While on the other hand, those who had negative work-life balance were found to be experiencing heavy work pressure and work-loads with no proper support from management.

and had personal family issues due to these work imbalances. Therefore, it is indicated that the organisation with workplace culture which promote effective communication with its employees will be not only able to evaluate employee performance effectively but also helps in understanding employees' evolving needs at the times of economic slowdown, which in turn enhance employee commitment and engagement towards achievement of organisational goals and objectives (Clutterbuck, 2003)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Overview**

This chapter presents the research methodology adopted for the research study “The effect on employees’ Work-Life Balance at HCA, Ireland during turbulent times” through determining Section 3(1) Introduction, 3(2)Research Aims, Objectives, Question, 3(3)Quantitative Vs Qualitative, 3(4) Advantages of survey, 3(5)Research Method and Strategy Adopted, 3(6) theoretical research philosophy adopted, 3(7)Link Between Research questions and Methodology 3(8) Research Ethics

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Saunders et al (2009) indicates that research design in the foremost and important aspect of the research process as it involves in determination of the process of examination, recognition, evaluation and implementation of research tools and techniques The design process of the research study plays a vital role in conducting research activities smoothly and focus on providing effective co-ordination throughout the research process It helps in the selection of appropriate research strategies, data collection methods and data analysing techniques suitable for the research context and determines a subtle plan for achieving research objectives in an effective and efficient manner (Leedy and Ormrod, 2009)

#### **3.2 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions**

##### **Aims**

The main aim of this research study is to analyse the impact of on-going recession or economic slowdown on the work-life balance practices of the employees at HCA one of the largest public sector in Ireland This research will look into critically analysing the effect of

employees' work-life balance during the turbulent times through focusing on the achievement of the following (as demonstrated in the below-mentioned objectives)

### Objectives

- To analyse the present work-life balance practices of HCA among clerical officers and health care advisors
- To understand work-life balance of employees during on-going recession
- To evaluate an employee satisfaction towards work-life balance practices of the organisation
- To outline a suitable recommendation to enhance work-life balance strategies in order to overcome any possible setbacks in the current work-life balance practices followed at HSE

### Questions

The research study aims to address the following questions by logically linking research findings with the theoretical concepts and studies discussed in the literature review which are

- What is the impact of work-life balance practices on employees' commitment and performance?
- Will organisations' policies address the needs of its employees during turbulent times or not? Are there much aligned towards business interests or employees' interests?
- What is the effect on employees' work and non-work life roles due to any potential changes in the policies during the turbulent times?

### **3.3 Quantitative Versus Qualitative Research**

#### **Quantitative Research:**

This type of research emphasises on the quantification of the collection and analysis of data Bryman (2004) Hence, Quantitative methods involve data collection using techniques such as survey questionnaires, structured interviews and experiments (Saunders et al, 2009) The researcher believes that achieving objectivity will increase outcomes and finding from this research thus reflecting reality of situation studied Therefore, the use of combination of both survey questionnaire and semi-structured/Structured interviews will not only enable the researcher to examine the relationship between employees' performance and work-life balance practices of the organisation but also helps in collecting the individual opinions, perceptions of the employees (or respondents) This research method collect data using quantitative paradigm, and deductive approach

One significant use of quantitative research is that it employs collecting and analysing numerical data using statistical tests Another advantage of this type of research is that it is easier to carry out the analysis and write up because it's extremely structured

In conducting quantitative research, the researcher is careful and objective so as not to influence study with personal values and perceptions (Burns et al, 1993), because objectivity reduces the risk of bias which can impact negatively on internal validity of a study A questionnaire is a relatively direct method of obtaining information (McColl, 1993), while (Burns et al, 1993) stated in his research that Questions are part of questionnaire either open, both or combined He further states that questionnaires are used to collect information, to assess a level of knowledge, however, Pout et al, (1991) argues that questionnaires are associated to poor response rate due to lack of respondent motivation to complete According to Saunders et al (2009), one of the advantages of survey strategy is that, it helps to gather

data for large sample in a cost effective way within a short period of time It is the least expensive strategy and uses techniques such as online survey questionnaires consisting of both open and closed questions (Lancaster, 2005)

### **Qualitative Research:**

In comparison to quantitative Methods, qualitative method emphasises on words used relatively than quantification (Bryman 2004), and accordingly, tends to work along with qualitative methods such as in-depth interview, focus group and ethnography Interview, on the other hand is a systematic way of talking and listening to people that is, an exchange of view between two or more people on a topic (Kvale, 1996) Qualitative research follows primarily inductive approach, and discovery oriented, approach (Bryman 2004, Deshpande 1983), embodying analysis of social reality as a continuously shifting property of individuals' perceptions (Bryman 2004) with aim of gaining "insiders" understanding (Deshpande 1983,) of the phenomena under study

Furthermore, this can be described to be more one-sided as it involves examining and reflecting on perceptions in order to gain an understanding of social reality and perceptions Unlike the quantitative research, this is more complex to analyse and when conducting the final report A major problem of qualitative data analysis shows no clear and established position of conventions for investigation of link to those observed with quantitative data (Robson 1993) One approach is to quantify the data, either formally or informally, in other words, turn the qualitative data into quantitative data

### **3.4 Advantages of survey research chosen**

In addition to research survey strategy, the study uses survey strategy mainly aimed to collect information for large sample of clerical staff and health advisors within the organisation

According to Saunders et al (2009) the use of survey strategy enables the researcher to gather data for large sample in a cost effective way within a short period of time. It is the least expensive strategy and uses techniques such as online survey questionnaires consisting of both open and closed questions (Lancaster, 2005)

The questionnaire was prepared using Likert Scale. The survey strategy adopted has made it possible for the researcher to collect information in a cost effective way within the limited time and the data collected will be free from any external biases. However, it may not provide in detail information and any interpretations of the subject raised which may in turn lead to misconception of the research context (Saunders et al, 2009)

### **3.5 Research Method and Strategy Adopted**

This research study adopts a quantitative approach and uses a combination of both the survey strategy and interview. Mainly, in the current research context, perceptions of the individuals are involved and in order to examine the factors that influence the work-life balance practices of employees the use of survey will enable the researcher to obtain valid and reliable information through analysing and understanding the perceptions of two parties in an organisation.

Given that HCA employs around 110,000 employees in Ireland (June 2012 whole term employee 102,292), this study employs qualitative techniques like semi-structured interviews and provides a chance to manifold different levels of analysis through enabling qualitative design, which has an ability to give full and in-depth vision of the research context and also questionnaire to collect information for large sample of clerical staff and health care advisors within the organisation. HCA is a large organisation, the author understands the organisation is dispersed around the country, so it focuses on population of employee within Dublin area. The researcher's methodologies, focus on phenomena, therefore the research will be

quantitative and qualitative inform of questionnaire and semi structured interview However, logic of the research will indicate if there is need for the researcher to move from general to the specific This research will employ deductive approach, where focus is on data The researcher will employ semi structured interview to explore the participants understanding of the research

Semi- structured interviews were held with the Line Managers and the HR manager to assess WLB within the organization, in the current economic climate, every research is expected to have targeted population, Sutton, (2004) states that a population is every possible person that is used when conducting a research The author collected primary data by using survey fully completed questionnaire for 55 employees, out of the 80 questionnaires sent out and 5 semi-structured interviews, whereas the secondary data is derived in the form company's HR policy documents, annual reports and other organisational reports Therefore, the use of combination of both survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews will not only enable the researcher to examine the relationship between employees' performance and work-life balance practices of the organisation but also helps in collecting the individual opinions, perceptions of the employees (or respondents) Saunders et al (2012) Although the use of both methods may result in significant costs, resources and time but it will provide valid and reliable information with an objective to achieve research aims and objectives in an effective and efficient manner

After the interview, employees received survey which was distributed face to face by hand but submitted to a collection box in the administration office, by email and post with the help of the Line manager who asked for the participation of all employees who were given company's time to complete it The survey was accompanied with an introductory note describing briefly the nature of the study and assuring participants complete confidentiality

and anonymity (See Appendix 2) The survey prepared for this research consisted of set of questions which includes, age, gender, full or part time etc and all required a response thus eliminating the episode of missing values which may affect the reliability and validity of research The administration of the questionnaire was later followed up by appreciating all those who had participated and urging those who had not yet responded to please do so

Upon communication with the Line Manager of HCA, the researcher encountered different issues around sensitivity on behalf of the company's privacy, as well as respondents who were also concerned about given out information relating to their perception of the organization's policies and practices regarding WLB Facing any contamination in respondent answer to question can bring about validity issues which can impact on the reliability of the research, the researcher had ensured that the questionnaire's wording and construction is put into consideration as this can impact on data input and responses from respondent Also, while referring to the secondary data resources all the information, studies, concepts and theories derived from the books, company reports, policy documents and online resources will be fully acknowledged, appreciated and referred accordingly

It's the researchers perception that Work –Life balance has faced considerable changes in the way organisational practices (mainly work-life balance practices) are managed, thus, also significantly impact the employees' work and personal life balance So the main aim of this research is to 'analyse the impact of on-gomg recession or economic slowdown on the work-life balance practices of the employees' at HCA, one of the largest public sector in Ireland The researcher methodologies focus on phenomena, therefore this research will be quantitative and qualitative inform of questionnaire and semi structured interview This author employed deductive approach Deductive research approach is linked to answer the questions, what who, where, how much and how many questions The researcher tends to use

exploratory and elements of descriptive research to answer the what, how, why questions. As research is an organised approach to solutions to any given questions, the author hopes that the outcome of this research will give more light to work-life balance during recession, employee's satisfaction towards work-life balance, effect on employees work and non work roles due to potential change in policies during recession.

In this research study, the primary data is collected from a research sample using both survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The information collected will be investigated with a qualitative research technique and through use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences 18.0 (SPSS) packages so that patterns and themes can be identified accordingly and can be used while presenting detailed analysis. However, these descriptive analyses helped in presenting the data in a logical way without complexity of mean, median numbers. Mainly, linking the emerging themes with the studies, concepts and theories discussed in the literature section will not only enable to develop descriptive framework which can also be explained as cases but also provides results with more generalization, validity and reliability.

Also, the use of semi-structured interviews will enable the researcher to ask follow up questions which not only help in gaining in-depth information about the research subjects but also enables to address the research questions effectively (Saunders et al, 2007). The data is presented in a logical and structured manner with a clear motive to achieve aims and objectives of the research study. On the other hand, the data gathered through survey questionnaires administered to research sample is categorised based on the variables of the questionnaire (say length of the service and so on) and are presented using pie diagrams, charts and graphs respectively. Finally, based on the data analysis, suitable recommendations for the research study will be outlined and every measure will be taken to protect and enhance

the validity and reliability of the data in order to produce more generalised and reliable results (Bryman and Bell, 2007)

Reliability according to (Burns et al, 1993) is mainly concerned with how consistently the measurement technique measures the concept of interest. The researcher has chosen a positivistic approach which questions reflect quantifiable information free of bias. The validity of a research asks the question, is the research measuring what it is supposed to measure? To ensure validity the researcher will use easily understood questions both in interview and questionnaires and a follow up of respondent to discuss accuracy.

The researcher developed trust by stating the reason for conducting the research which is to fulfil academic purpose and reassure respondents, employees of the strictly adopting a high level of confidentiality that is respondent will not be identified or quoted directly.

### **3.6 Theoretical Research Philosophy Adopted**

This research study adopts both positivism and interpretivism philosophies as it enables the researcher to observe and analyse research process both within the perceptions of the individuals and by being part of the research environment (Saunders et al, 2009). The reason behind the adoption of positivism was that the current research requires understanding of the facts and perceptions of the individuals with little or no influence of other research variables allows structured and logical responses. On the other hand interpretive philosophy enables the researcher to conduct research in a subjective manner and helps in understanding the meaning or situation deeply in a better way with high amount of interaction with the participants (Yin, 2009). Thus, use of both approaches enables researcher to gain great insights of the research variables and understand the difference between the perceptions of the individuals in a logical and ethical manner (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Saunders et al (2009) suggests that the determination of research philosophy will enable the researcher to recognise the potential assumptions and plans with regards to the research process. The assumptions and plans underpinning the research context will help researcher in developing research strategies and methods which enable to achieve logical and ethical results. De Vaus (2002) indicates that different factors influence research philosophy and it is highly critical to establish a positive relationship between knowledge on the research subject and the processes adopted to carry out research in order to achieve research aims and objectives. Also, it is argued that while conducting a research process there involves different sectors which not only influence each other but also effect overall composition of the process. This is clearly explained through using the concept of research onion which indicates the various sectors involved in the research process and how they interconnect with each other (Saunders et al, 2009). The figure 1 below presents the concept of research onion explaining different sectors and their influence on each other.

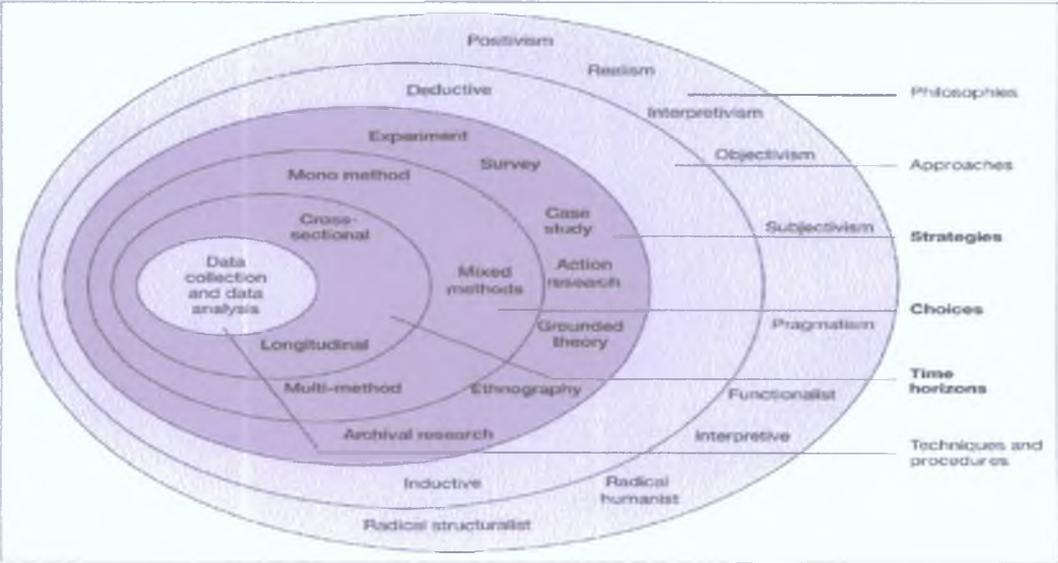


Figure 5 1 The research 'onion'  
 Source: © Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2006

Figure 1: Research Onion, Source: Saunders et al, 2009.

Positivism philosophy enables researcher to examine the relationship between different research variables which are being studied in this current research context. It also helps researcher in analysing the research variables concerning with the research study and enables to understand how these variables are responding and leading to the generalised real world settings (Saunders et al, 2009). Moreover, positivism philosophy adopts quantitative approach and presents research context as external and objective. It entails an objective understanding of the research study through observing and analysing specific information derived from experimentation and questionnaires and basically employs large samples (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This philosophy believes that the scientific approach is the efficient method to analyse and understand the processes which involve human and other physical events and researcher do not exhibits any influence on the research findings due to short term (or low) interaction with the respondents.

On the other hand, interpretive philosophy assumes that the human actions and perceptions are based on social norms, values and beliefs and is highly subjective (Kern, 2009). It is mainly based upon a comprehensive and holistic approach which enables researcher to analyse and investigate complex situations and processes as a part of the research environment and may impacted by the personal interests (Saunders et al, 2009). It emphasize on the situation or context of the research study and the researcher may develop long term relationship with the respondents with an objective to gain empathy and trust engaging completely into the concepts or variables under study (Saunders et al, 2009). The size of research sample employed in this research is generally small and the study focus on in-depth information over a long period of time (Saunders et al, 2009). The information of this research is collected through using data collection methods such as interviews (open-ended and semi-structured), observations, documentation and case studies (Yin, 2009).

It's the researchers perception that Work –Life balance has faced considerable changes in the way organisational practices (mainly work-life balance practices) are managed, thus, also significantly impact the employees' work and personal life balance. So the main aim of this research is to 'analyse the impact of on-gomg recession or economic slowdown on the work-life balance practices of the employees' at HCA, one of the largest public sector in Ireland

### **3.7 Link between Research Questions and Methodology:**

The first question, what is the impact of work-life balance practices on employees' commitment and performance involved the researcher to choose both methods of qualitative and quantitative. The researcher conducted a semi- structured interview, which were held with the Line Managers and the HR manager, assess WLB within the organization, in the current economic climate and there is need to understand the existing WLB practices (See Appendix 2). One of the advantages of this type of survey is that it helps in gathering of valid and reliable data which will help refine ideas that are relevant to the researcher aims and objective. Questionnaires were also given to participant regarding same questions to ascertain employees view.

The second question, will organisations' policies address the needs of its employees during turbulent times or not? Are there much aligned towards business interests or employees' interests? This also involved the use of unstructured interview/structured interview with managers on laid down policies as well as needs of employee and business needs, so as to obtain specific information from respondent leaving more room for unanticipated questions that may arise in the course of interview.

Finally, the third question address the effect on employees' work and non-work hfe roles due to any potential changes in the policies during the turbulent times?, this question attracted quantitative type of survey an specifically use of questionnaire. As this is to enquire on

perception of employees in term of recent economic downturn and its impact on work and non work roles, as well as qualitative survey type because it helped in finding out the employee perspective m term of effect on work m the organisation

### **3.8 Research Ethics**

Research ethics and values form an important part of the research study As the study involves sensitive information about organisational practices it takes utmost care to carry out research with great moral and make sure it does not hurt anyone's personal feelings, emotions or sentiments

This research study strictly adheres to all the guidelines specified by the University ensuring compliance throughout the research process The entire research process has been conducted in a legal and ethical manner following research guidelines strictly All the respondents were informed about the purpose and nature of the study and all the questions (both in questionnaire and interview schedule) are framed in a clear, precise and professional manner without hurting anyone's feelings or sentiments Every participant is assured at most privacy and confidentiality and it is conveyed that the data gathered will be purely used for the academic purposes only (see appendix 1 Questionnaire) Furthermore, participants are given right to withdraw from the research at any point of the process and all the information of the participants will be anonymous

Adding to it, a high degree of confidentiality and anonymity is maintained during entire research process with clear assurance that the data collected will be purely used for only academc purposes At the same time, all the participants will be informed about the purpose of the research study and a right to withdraw from the study at any time will be entailed to every participant

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS & ANALYSIS**

#### **4.0 Overview**

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the data collection methods and the data collected in analysed through linking with the concepts and theories discussed in the literature review chapter of the research study. The chapter logically presents the data collected from HCA employees by employing survey questionnaire and interview schedules and discusses the work-life balance practices of the organisation by relating to the theoretical concepts and studies of the work-life balance. The data is collected by administering 55 out of 80 surveys response and 5 semi structured interviews to the various employees at HCA and the sample selected only covers clerical officers and health advisors within HCA, and this also serve as best representative of the entire research population. The primary reason for selecting public organisation like HCA is due to its eminent exposure to recent economic crisis which enforced governments to implement significant budget cuts and financial constraints impacting both employees' work-life balance and the way organisation manage its work-life balance practices. Furthermore, the data gathered and discussions presented in this chapter clearly aim to achieve research aims and objectives, based on which suitable recommendations for the research study are derived in the following chapter.

#### **4.1 Composition of the research sample**

Saunders et al (2009) advocates that the selection of appropriate composition of the research sample, which best represents the entire research population is highly significant for gathering and presenting valid and reliable research findings. The research study uses probability sampling methods for selecting appropriate research sample which represents two

different job functionalities within HCA. It employs 55 survey questionnaires for the operational employees and conducts 5 face to face semi-structured interviews for the clerical grade 4 employees. The sample composition constitutes of employees from clerical grade 3, clerical grade 4 and health advisors, and figure 1 indicates the composition of the research sample of the study, which is derived from the responses of the research sample for the question 6 (please refer appendix 1 for the survey questionnaire).

From the responses it can be analysed that the research sample constitutes of 35 employees from clerical grade 3, 17 employees from clerical grade 4 and 8 health advisors. The figure 1 below presents a graphical composition of the research sample and it can also be analysed that the sample best represents the entire research population. Therefore, data gathered from such diverse research sample may provide information which might have greater validity and reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

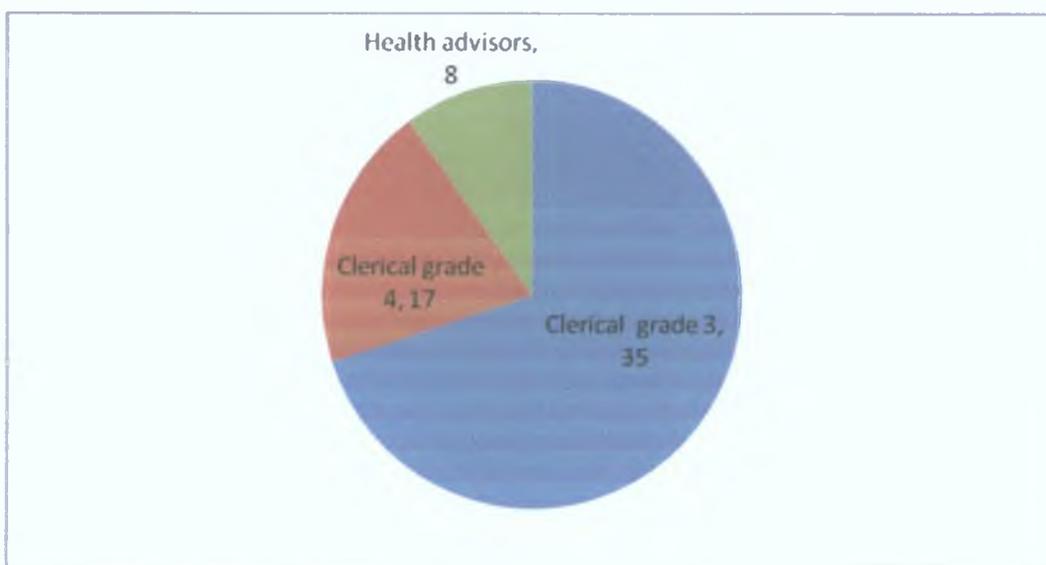


Figure 1: Composition of the research sample based on the job roles.

Similarly, based on the responses of the research sample the composition can also be represented in the terms of gender, age and marital status Williams (2007) indicates that it is important to analyse and understand the research sample composition in these terms due to the nature of the research study and as the study deals with the work-life balance of the employees it is highly significant to determine the demographics as they indicate great influence on the work-life balance practices of the individuals and may possess different implications For instance, Beauregard and Henry (2009) research study suggests that the presence of greater number of female employees in an organisation may indicate different work-life balance issues as they execute significant role in managing both their personal life roles (family and children) and work roles effectively, when compared to their male counterparts Moreover, determination of demographics is extremely important while carrying out research studies involving individual's work-life balance as they indicate significant influence on the performance and perceptions of the individuals (Helen, 2002)

The figure 2 indicates the responses of the research sample on the basis of gender, where 45 employees are female and 15 employees are male This pattern closely resembles the employee pattern at the HCA and it is understood that the presence of female employees are considerable high in the health services when compared to the male employees Deborah and Margaret (2008) indicates that this pattern of increased female employment can be mainly noticed in the last two decades with number of female employees increasing across different public sector organisations like that of HCA

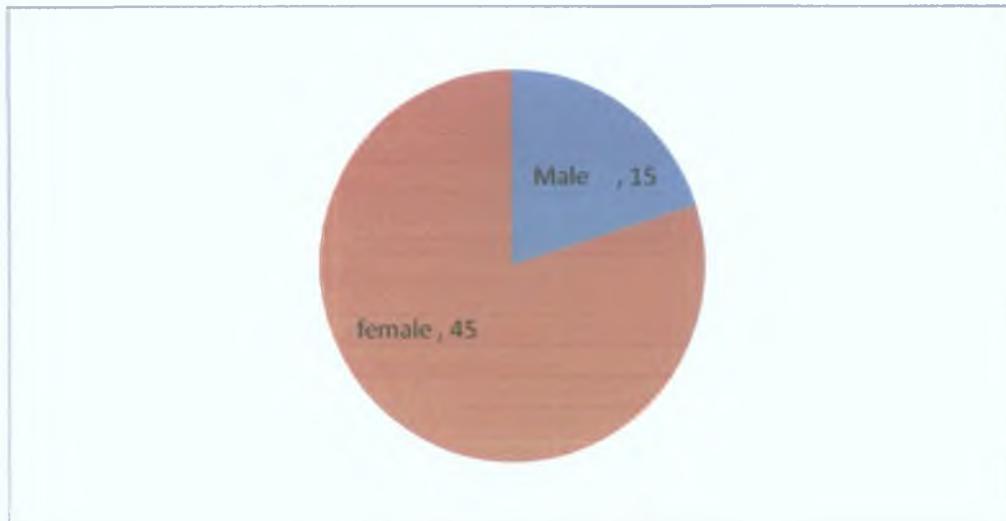


Figure 2: Composition of the research sample based on the gender.

On the other hand, the figure 3 shows the composition of the employee sample based on the age groups and from the results it can be analysed that the sample constitutes of 2 employees of age group 18-25, 15 employees of age group between 26-35, 30 employees of age group 36-45 and 13 employees of age group 46-59. Although there are some employees in the organisation with age more than 60 but the percentage of the employees is extremely low and none included in the research sample.

Age	observations	Frequencies
18-25	2	3%
26-35	15	25%
36-45	30	50%
46-59	13	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100%</b>

Figure 3: Composition of the research sample based on the age groups.

According to the study conducted by the Williams (2007) marital status play significant influence on the individual's work-life balance and may have various implications. For instance, the study suggests that the employees with children may face issues in balancing their work and personal life and may not be flexible in terms of working patterns when compared to the other employees. From the responses of the survey, it can be analysed that 33 employees are married with children, 15 are married, 7 are single and 5 are divorced and marital status has great influence on the individuals to meet needs of both personal life and work life roles respectively. When asked about the influence of marital status on the individual's work life balance, one of the employees responded saying,

*'I am 46 years old, married and mother of two children... and often it is challenging to manage both my personal and work roles, mainly in terms of flexibility and allocating time for the family. With the recent economic crisis and increase in the budget cuts it became more challenging to manage workloads and interests of the family respectively.'*

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>observations</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>
<b>Single</b>	7	11.7%
<b>Married</b>	15	25%
<b>Married with children</b>	33	55%
<b>Divorced</b>	5	8.3%
<b>Total</b>	60	100%

Figure 4: Composition of the research sample based on the marital status.

The length of the employment, working patterns and educational qualifications will help to analyse employees understanding of the organisational practices and their perceptions, knowledge and exposure to the organisation's work-life balance practices and workplace culture (Beauregard and Henry, 2009). The figure 5 indicates the responses of the survey sample on their length of the employment at HCA, from which it can be analysed that, 2 employees are part of HCA since less than a year, 20 employees are working for 1-5 years, 30 employees are working for 6-10 years and 8 employees are working for than 10 years respectively. One of the employee quoted saying (Please refer question 3, 4, 5 in the interview schedule)

*'I have been part of the organisation since last 10 years and my work behaviour is very much integral to the work culture of the organisation... I have been part of both growth and challenging times of the organisation it has been a great experience being part of HCA during this transition periods'*

<b>Length of the service at HCA</b>	<b>observations</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>
<b>Less than a year</b>	2	3.33%
<b>1-5 years</b>	20	33.3%
<b>6-10 years</b>	30	50%
<b>10+ years</b>	8	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	60	100%

Figure 5: Composition of the research sample based on the length of the service at HCA

Clutterbuck (2003) suggests that the working patterns of an organisation play an important role in the work-life balance of the individuals. Traditionally, flexibility in the working

patterns was introduced as part of family-friendly policies in order to encourage and motivate employees to balance their personal and professional life effectively. Furthermore, with the growth of women employment the implementation of flexible working patterns have increased significantly over the years and have become important aspect of organisation's work-life balance practices (Burke and Cooper, 2010).

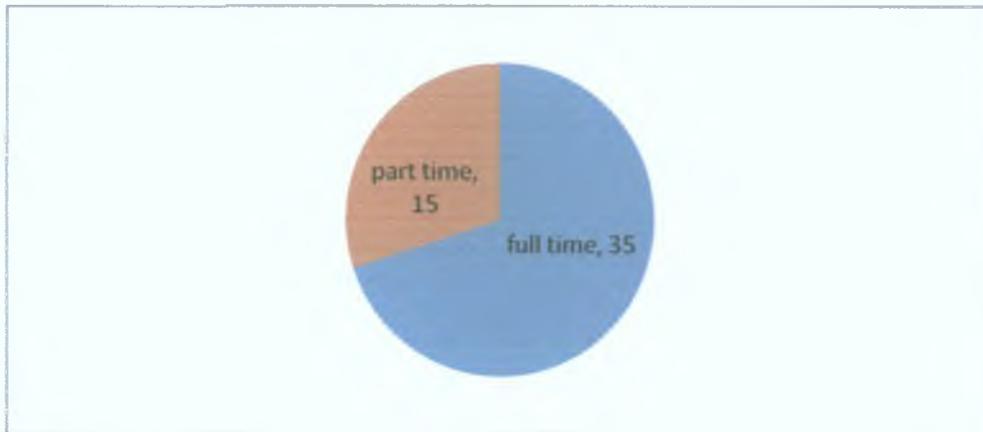


Figure 6: Composition of the research sample based on the current working patterns

From the figure 6, it can be analysed that the majority of the employees from the research sample work full time, which includes 35 employees and other 15 employees work on the part time basis. At the same time, determining flexibility in the working patterns the sample responses indicate that there is greater flexibility in organisational working practices. From the figure 7 it can be observed that 25 employees work in a regular shift, 18 work in a morning shift and 17 in an evening shift. These responses also indicate the changes in the working patterns of the organisation during turbulence times such as economic crisis and budget cuts. For instance, some of the employees participated in the study commented saying that, (Please refer question 5, 6 and 8 in the interview schedule)

*Comparatively, there has been increase in the working hours and reduction in the work flexibility during recent economic crisis which is mainly fuelled by budget cuts and*

*government cuts in the public sector spending..... for example, most of the employees used to work full time with less number of part time staff.... but now a days there is increase in the part time staff so that they can be maintained on short payrolls and less benefits to full time staff... Also, previously there used to be great flexibility in the work shifts but now a day it is bit challenging..... also they removed some of the full-time staff in the last six months ....*

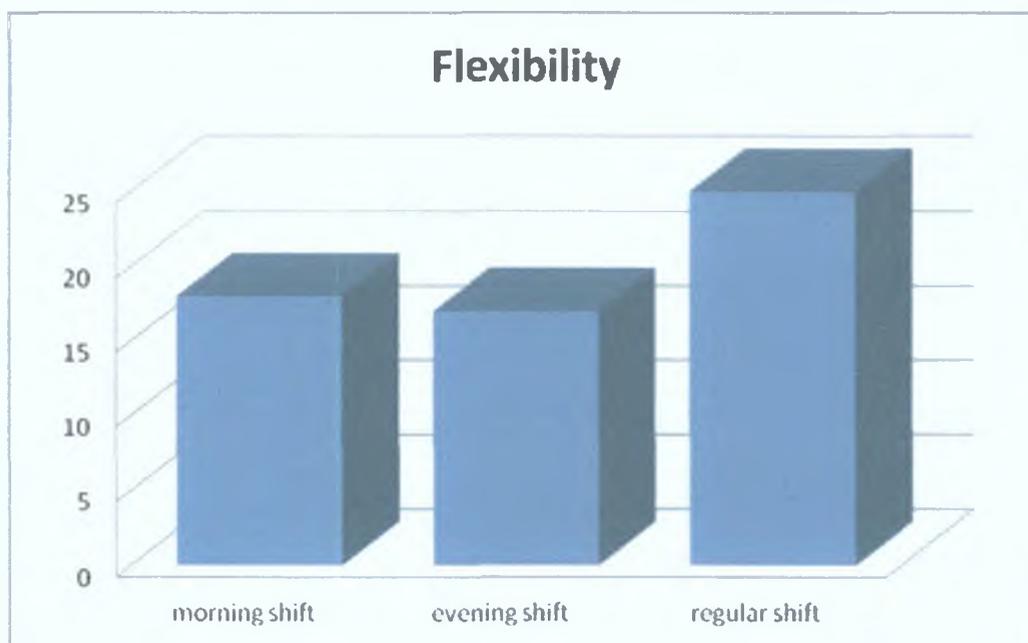


Figure 7: Composition of the research sample determining flexible working patterns at HCA

#### **4.2 Work-Life Balance practices at HCA**

Bunting (2004) suggests that the work life balance practices relates to how individual employees attain effective balance between their work life and personal life and at the same time, this practice is more depended on how effectively the organisation supports its employees in attaining this balance. Many successful organisations have been recognized for their effective work life balance practices and they understand the importance of providing this benefit within the workplace context. Furthermore, implementation of effective work-life balance practices will not only provide employee satisfaction but also enhance employee

productivity in the organisation (Caproni, 2004). For instance, providing work life balance practices such as flexible working, time off requests, compressed working hours, home based working and job sharing help to improve employee motivation and enhances their job performance and commitment (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007).

According to Davies (2007), significant changes occurred in the workplace demographics over the last few decades which resulted in the need for work-life balance practices for managing both work and personal life roles effectively. At the same time, it is argued that the implementation of effective work-life balance practices will increase employee commitment and engagement towards organisational goals and objectives, which may in turn improve overall organisational performance. When asked about the importance of work-life balance practices in the organisation one of the interviewee responding saying, (Please refer question 10 and 11 in the interview schedule)

*Honestly, HCA believes that the facilitation of excellent work-life balance helps employees to enhance their performance and commitment and creates harmony in the workplace, which is both enjoyable and productive... Furthermore, it ensures that every employee in the organisation possesses good work-life balance through providing flexible working and healthy working conditions...*

	HCA focus on WLB practices (Ques 8.a)		Work culture for development of effective WLB practices (Ques 8.b)		Implement strategies that support WLB practices (Ques 8.c)	
	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency
<b>Strongly agree</b>	10	20%	15	25%	8	14%
<b>Agree</b>	30	60%	35	70%	30	50%
<b>Neither</b>	5	5%	1	1%	5	10%

<b>agree nor disagree</b>						
<b>Disagree</b>	8	10%	4	4%	9	20%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	2	5%	0	0%	3	6%
<b>total</b>	55	100%	55	100%	55	100%

Figure 8: Responses indicating Work-life balance (WLB) practices at HCA

The figure 8 shows the responses of the survey sample indicating their view on work-life balance practices at HCA for the survey questions 8.a, 8.b and 8.c (please refer to the survey questionnaire in the appendix 1). The employee respondents indicate their responses or perceptions on HCA's focus on providing effective work-life balance practice, work culture emphasizing development of effective work-life balances and whether HCA implement strategies that support and promote effective work-life balances or not. From the responses and the results from the SPSS analysis, it can be analysed that majority of the employees agree with the fact that HCA implements good work-life balance practices and this can be noticed in the above figure 8, where agreement frequency for the statements 8.a, 8.b and 8.c is relatively high with less disagreement across the sample. It can be also observed that the implementation of effective work-life balance practices are integral to the organisation's work culture and HCA seeks work-life balance practices as a source of competitive advantage for attracting and retaining talented workforce (Romer, 2011).

However, on the other hand, the responses also indicates that the recent recession enforced organisation had to adopt strict working hours and less work life balance in order to meet operational efficiency and organisational objectives. Furthermore, focus on cutting down the costs HCA had to reduce the flexible working options which have not only impacted

employees' work life balance but organisational performance to some extent. Adding to it, lack of work-life balance sometimes resulted in the increase of absenteeism and created high work pressure and intensity. For instance, from the responses of the research sample based on the survey questionnaire it is analysed that majority of the employees feel that the lack of work-life balance during recent recession times increased absenteeism and created high work pressure and intensity. The figure 9 presents the responses of the employee sample in the graphical representation, where majority of the employees agree with the statement of 'The lack of work-life balance resulted in increase of absenteeism and created high work pressure and intensity?' (Please see appendix for the survey question number 8.g)

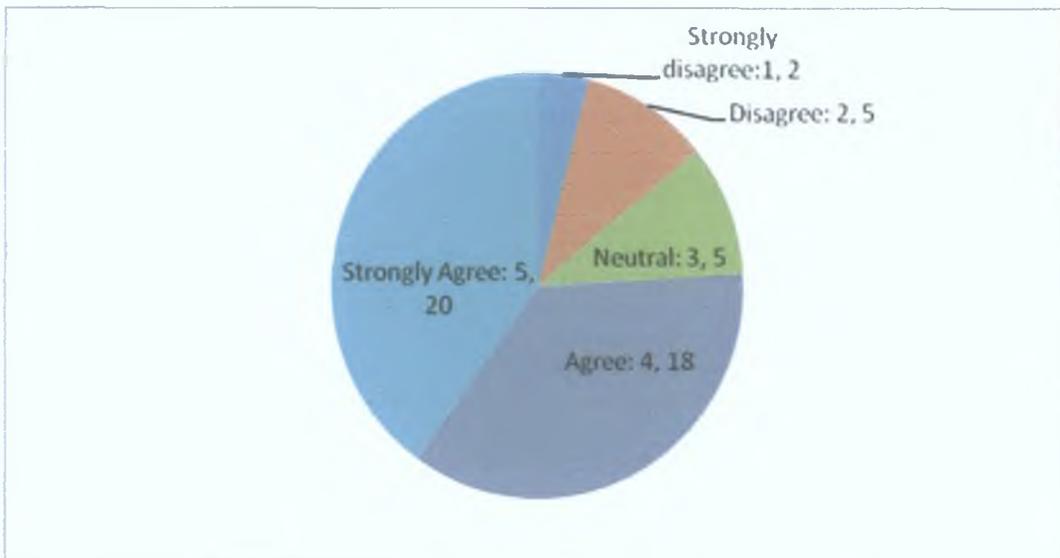


Figure 9: Responses indicating employees' view on lack of work-life balance during recession times.

Estes (2004) advocates that the effectiveness in the work-life balance practices of an organisation will enable employees to manage their work and personal life effectively through providing personal fulfilment and satisfaction and drive them towards organisational goals with greater commitment and engagement. For instance, studies on work-life balance practices within an organisational context indicates a direct relationship between variables

like employee performance, motivation and organisational productivity and an effective work-life balance practices will enhance the performance such variables (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007). When employees enquired about their opinion on whether implemented work-life balance practices created meaning for employees' work and motivated them to perform better or not (please refer survey question 8.d and 8.e), most of the employees replied positively indicating their agreement and the following table below indicates its results respectively. Furthermore, the responses of the employee sample for the implementation of work-life balance practices such as flexible working, health and pension schemes, study and job breaks, job sharing, leave plans, voluntary working times, e-working, and teleworking (please see survey question 8.f in the appendix), 64 percent of the employee sample responded positively with their opinions reflecting significant influence of recession and budget cuts on these WLB practices in the recent times.

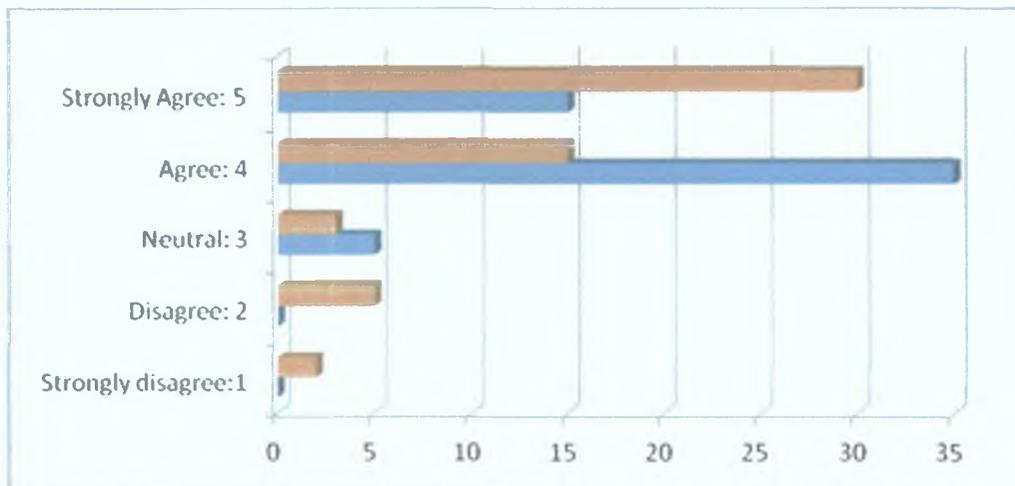
	HCA's WLB practices enhance employee motivation and commitment (Ques 8.d)		HCA's WLB practices enable you to balance you work and personal life roles (Ques 8.e)		HCA's encourage WLB practices such as flexible working, job sharing etc. (Ques 8.f)	
	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency
<b>Strongly agree</b>	15	30%	5	9%	8	14%
<b>Agree</b>	35	65%	25	45%	30	50%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	2	4%	10	18%	5	10%
<b>Disagree</b>	3	6%	10	18%	9	20%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	0	0%	5	10%	3	6%
<b>total</b>	55	100%	55	100%	55	100%

Also, quoting the emphasis of HCA's work culture on the development and implementation of effective work-life balance practices, one of the interviewee commented that (Please refer question 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the interview schedule)

*'HCA recognise the significance of achieving balance between work and life roles of an individuals and its practices mainly focus to improve working lives of the employees through developing and implementing various initiatives it also believe that developing culture which promotes positive work-life balance can bring great change to the workplace culture and attitudes of the employees through reducing stress and work intensity at the same time increase employee motivation to perform better and thus enhancing employee productivity and overall organisational performance '*

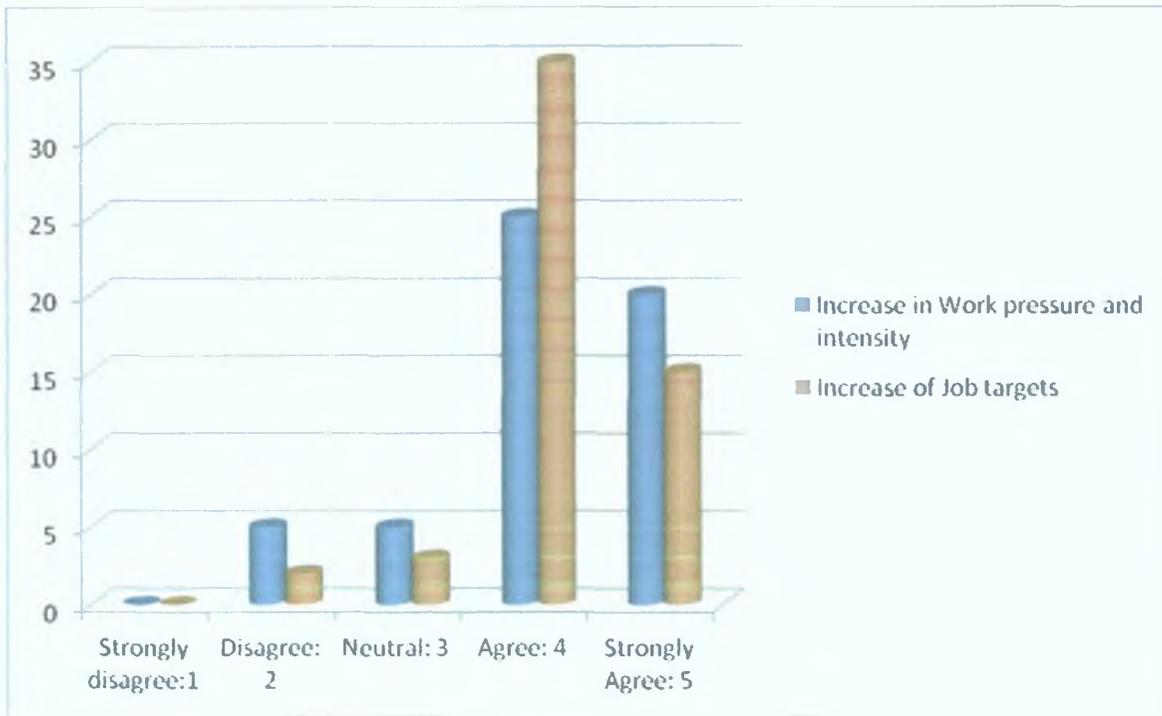
Furthermore, it is indicated that HCA implement and encourage work-life balance practices like flexible working, health and pension schemes, study and job breaks which improve employee commitment and engagement (Clutterbuck, 2003) However, it is argued that the influence of recession is significantly highly on the HCA's work-life balance practices making it reduce to some of its work-life balance practices This can be analysed from the responses of the employee sample for the survey question 8 h, where 80 % percent of the responses believe work-life balance is at heart of HCA but has been impacted significantly with recent economic crisis and budget cuts (see figure below) For example, budget cuts by the Irish government in the public sector organisations have resulted in greater redundancies, increased work intensity, number of working hours and job insecurity affecting employees' work-life balance badly (CIPD, 2010) This supports the findings derived from the research study carried out by Institute for Employment Studies (IES) which indicates the influence of recession on employees' work-life balance, mainly in the public sector organisations like HCA, where there has been significance effect on the employees' well-being and work life

which not only created serious imbalances in their work and personal life activities but also affected their job performance (IES, 2010).



#### **4.3 Work life balance practices during recession times**

Contrastingly the findings show that work life balance practices adopted during the recession times were lower compared to non-recession times. The survey conducted on 55 employees at the HCA, Ireland, revealed that work environment was pressurized and stressful during the recession along with overtime working hours leading to inflexible working for most of the employees. As Burke and Cooper (2010) suggested that with the recent recession most of the organisations had to adopt strict working hours and less work life balance in order to meet operational efficiency and organisational objectives, the current study on HCA's work life balance justifies the same.



Survey Responses for Q 9.b and 9.g: There is great increase in the work pressure, job targets and work load during recession times due to budget cuts?

Secondly, with regards to the pay cuts and reduction in bonuses or benefits, 60% of the employees surveyed agreed strongly that they experienced pay cuts and reduction in bonuses and day offs during the recent recession while other 30% employees partially agreed that they faced the reductions in pay (Please refer to the table below for the survey responses). This finding can be linked to the studies conducted on work life balance during recent recession by Federman (2009) which suggested that the financial crisis had great impact on employees' well-being in the form of pay reductions, no bonuses or incentives, fewer breaks and holidays. Hence, it can be analysed from the survey that the economic slowdown had negative influence on the employees work life balance in terms of reduced pay and benefits as well as increased working hours. In addition to this, one of the employees responded quoting, (Please refer question 9,10, 11 in the interview schedule)

*Yes, there was reduction in benefits..... and of course there is reduction is hours for part time employees during recent recession time..... this is mainly due to reduction in budget to our*

respective departments and had great work pressure to perform.... Honestly, due to reduction in budget most of advisors were asked to go on long leaves and this resulted in increase in work pressure for clerical employees...

Table 3

	HCA actively promoted WLB practices during recession times (Ques 9.a)		There is decrease in pay/cuts in benefits during recession (Ques 9.c)		HCA's provided flexible conditions to manage work intensity (Ques 9.e)	
	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency
<b>Strongly agree</b>	0	0%	33	60%	2	2%
<b>Agree</b>	5	10%	17	30%	4	8%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	10	18%	5	10%	5	10%
<b>Disagree</b>	25	45%	0	0%	19	32%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	15	25%	0	0%	25	46%
<b>total</b>	55	100%	55	100%	55	100%

Table: Responses indicating work-life balance practices at HCA during recession times

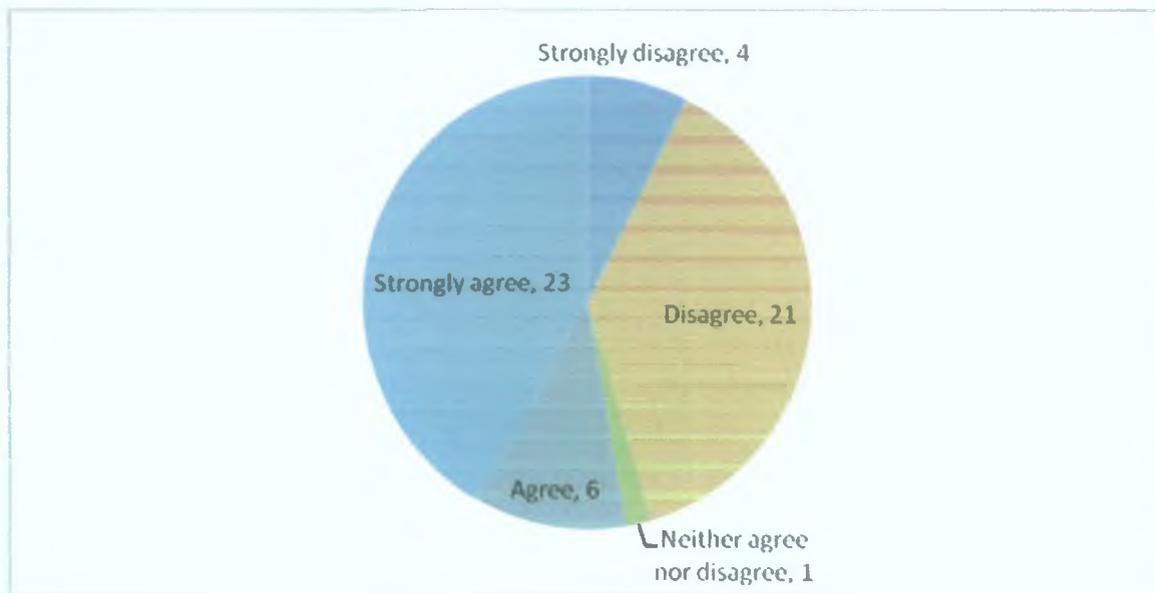
When asked about whether they were able to manage their work life and personal life during the pressurized situations the full time workers responded that they found it difficult to deal with daily activities during overtime working as they did not find enough time for their personal life. Furthermore, one of the employees commented saying that (Please refer question 12, 13, 15 in the interview schedule)

*It was really challenging to balance both my personal life and work life... mainly as I said earlier I am mother of two children and it is great responsibility of me to look into their well-*

*being and day to day activities I was intensely pressurised during that period both on the personal and professional front*

This justifies the studies conducted by Federman (2009) which revealed that employees faced low commitment and morale due to work life imbalances during recession which also impacted on their performance and productivity Also, for instance, the research study carried out by Institute for Employment Studies (IES) on the influence of recession on employees' work-life balance suggests that irrespective of private and public sectors there has been significance effect on the employees' well-being and work life which not only created serious imbalances in their work and personal life activities but also affected their job performance (IES, 2010) Whereas, the part time employees at HCA were able to manage their work life and personal life during recession as they did not experience overtime working due to contractual working time restrictions However the part time employees faced the pay cuts, reductions in bonuses or incentives, breaks and reduced holidays during the crisis

Considering the work from home option for flexibility, the survey indicated that employees at the clerical grade three and clerical grade four did not experience any flexible options to handle the work pressure while the health advisors were permitted to adopt telecommuting to carry out their operations during pressurized conditions



Survey Responses for 10.b): HCA provided excellent flexible conditions to manage work intensity during recession times

Finally, with regards to job security and redundancies during the economic slowdown, 34% of the employees surveyed responded that they felt partially secure about their jobs while rest of the 66% of the employees were not secure about their job due to high amount of redundancies. Adding to it, it is expressed that high work pressure, employee lay-off, reduction in working hours (for part time employees) and job insecurity resulted in demotivation and low commitment towards work goals and personal life activities. This supports the studies by Barnett et al (2003), where it suggests that high work pressure and job insecurity not only effects employee motivation and commitment towards organisational goals but also serious impact employee productivity and morale. This can be observed from the responses of the employee sample for the survey question 10.f, where 70 percent of the employees felt that lack of work-life balance practices at HCA during recession times had serious impact on employee motivation and commitment to organisational goals.

Furthermore, it is argued that there was neither proper management support nor good communication about organisational practise during recession times which created further confusion and insecurity among the employees. From the results in the table below, it can be analysed from the survey responses to the question 10 e (please refer to appendix for survey question) 46 percent expressed that there was no management support or proper communications, while 32 percent partially expressed their partially agreement. Adding to this, one of the employees quoted saying that (Please refer to the question 14,15 in the interview schedule),

*Some of the colleagues were asked to leave jobs. Moreover there was a fear of job insecurity even for full time employees. It was hard to concentrate on work coming daily with fear of job insecurity and managing family was great burden. In addition to this, there was no proper communication which resulted in further confusion and uncertainty.*

To sum up, the recent on-going recession had negative impact on the employee work life balance at the HCA, Ireland which revealed that majority of the full time employees experienced low balance between their work and personal life while part time employees has limited work life balance.

	<b>Employee lay-offs and sense of job insecurity during slowdown (Question 10. B)</b>		<b>Resulted in de-motivation and low commitment (Ques 10. f)</b>		<b>Management was supportive with good communication (Ques 10.e)</b>	
	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency	Observations	Frequency
<b>Strongly agree</b>	15	25%	24	50%	2	2%
<b>Agree</b>	25	45%	16	20%	4	8%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	10	18%	5	10%	5	10%
<b>Disagree</b>	4	10%	5	10%	19	32%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1	2%	5	10%	25	46%
<b>total</b>	55	100%	55	100%	55	100%

Survey Responses for questions on impact on work-life balance practices at HCA during recession.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Overview

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the research study and outlines suitable recommendations for the work life balance practices at HCA. It discusses the underlying advantages of effective work-life balance practices adopted by HCA during the turbulent times and derives suitable recommendations based on the findings and analysis of the research study. This chapter also outlines the potential drawbacks concerning research study followed by the future scope for further study on the topic.

#### 5.1 Conclusions

Jones et al (2006) indicates that effective work-life balance practices are two way business tool which not only enables individuals to manage both their personal and professional roles but it also enables organisations to save financial costs and resources by managing workforce effectively in accordance to rapidly changing business conditions. This research study on **'The effect on employees' Work-Life Balance during turbulent times is conducted at Health Care Alliance (HCA), Ireland**. From the responses, it can be observed that although work-life balance is at the heart of HCA's organisational practices but there were left behind during recession times. Mainly, it can be analysed from the responses of the employee respondents that HCA highly focus on providing effective work-life balance practice, develop a work culture which emphasize on the development of effective work-life balances and implement right strategies to support and promote those effective work-life balances. It is also indicated that the implementation of effective work-life balance practices are integral to the organisation's work culture and HCA seeks work-life balance practices as a source of competitive advantage for attracting and retaining talented workforce (Romer, 2011).

However, on the other hand, the responses also indicates that the recent recession enforced organisation had to adopt strict working hours and less work life balance in order to meet operational efficiency and organisational objectives. Furthermore, focus on cutting down the costs HCA had to reduce the flexible working options which have not only impacted employees' work life balance but organisational performance to some extent. Adding to it, lack of work-life balance sometimes resulted in the increase of absenteeism and created high work pressure and intensity. Furthermore, data findings and related studies suggest that the implementation of effective work-life balance practices will not only enhance employee motivation and commitment towards organisational goals but also effect employee productivity.

HCA implements 'work-life balance practices like flexible working conditions, pension schemes, insurance benefits, health care, job sharing and leave plans' increasing employee productivity and commitment to organisational goals and objectives (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007). However, it is argued that the influence of recession is significantly highly on the HSE's work-life balance practices making it reduce to some of its work-life balance practices. This can be analysed from the responses of the employee sample where 80 % of the responses believe work-life balance is at heart of HCA but has been impacted significantly with recent economic crisis and budget cuts. This findings compliment with the recent studies by the Irish government on the impact of budget cuts in the public sector organisations which indicated greater redundancies, increased work intensity, number of working hours and job insecurity affecting employees' work-life balance badly (CIPD, 2010). Adding to this, it also supports the findings derived from the research study carried out by Institute for Employment Studies (IES) which indicates the influence of recession on employees' work-life balance, mainly in the public sector organisations like HCA, where there has been significance effect.

on the employees' well-being and work life which not only created serious imbalances in their work and personal life activities but also affected their job performance (IES, 2010)

Finally, the findings of the study determines that the role of management and effective communication is extremely crucial in developing and implementing effective work-life balance practices across organisation as it not only reduce confusion and uncertainty among the workforce but also improve employee productivity and commitment (Torun, 2007) The results also suggest the impact of economic downturn on the work-life balance practices the HCA, with greater redundancies, less job insecurity and increased job targets Furthermore, it indicates that even though organisations emphasize on work-life balance practices like flexible working and job sharing but there are much aligned to the business requirements rather than individual needs For instance, during recession times in terms of part time employees, flexibility is mainly in terms of business requirements with more work stress during busy periods and no hours at turbulent times Furthermore, the findings conclude that the communication levels are minimal with less emphasis on improvement of work-life balance practices

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are derived from the data findings and analysis which enable organisation to reduce or mitigate the negative effects on the employees' work life balance and to develop and implement the effective work-life balance strategies at HCA

- Improve flexibility through flexi-time options It is important for an organisation like HCA to have efficient flexi-time options for both part-time and full time employees so that it will reduce work pressure and enhance team productivity The flexible working conditions needs to be developed with an objective to improve co-ordination

and productivity. The work objectives can be distributed efficiently so that work load for full time employees is avoided and human resources are managed effectively with respect to the organisational business strategies and goals

- **Enhance Job Sharing** facilitating job sharing option to the employees (where applicable) can help improve their efficiency and retain working at their best levels even at the times of turbulence. For example, studies indicate that the job sharing can reduce the work load and work intensity for workforce and provides them an opportunity to share their job tasks and responsibilities in a productive and less pressurized manner (Beardwell and Claydon, 2007)
- **Developing effective Leadership** An effective leadership is highly significant for developing working solutions which benefit both HCA and its employees, mainly at the times of turbulence and economic distortion. Beauregard and Henry (2009) indicate that effective leadership makes the organisational tasks simpler and efficient and good leadership will help to co-ordinate the job responsibilities, develop training objectives, review performances and finally implement strategic solutions effectively so that it benefits both HCA and employees
- **Framework to assess and measure the employees' work life balance** It is important to a framework which enables HCA to assess and measure employees' work life balance along with their job performances. For instance, by comparing the flexible working with required business outcomes it will not only enable organisation to measure work-life balance but also assess job performance. For instance, an effective framework which calculates the employee working hours with the levels of productivity will help to measure employees' work-life balance and develop strategies accordingly for its continuous improvement

- No discrimination between part-time and full time employees, mainly with regards to the working hours using flexi-time option during the times of recession This is because it will not only result in loss of talented part time employees but also result in sense of job insecurity among the full time employees Moreover, it may also result in discrimination of their career progression aspects and may impact personal life severely So, the tools and practices should be fair, specific and efficient, purely based on the individuals' skills, contribution, attitude and competencies
- Improving communication There should be effective communication between the management and the employees on an on-going basis and this should reflect on the every aspect of the organisation Mainly, during turbulent times effective communication play a significant role in enhancing employee motivation and commitment So, any changes to organisational practices and strategies needs to be communicated well with the employees and their suggestions and feedback should be noted before implementation so that there is good two way co-operation and flexible change

### **5.3 Drawbacks of the research study**

This research on the impact of economic downturn on the work life balance was conducted at HCA in Ireland This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative mode of research in collecting primary data. Qualitative mode of research was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 5 employees and quantitative method was conducted using survey questionnaires administered to 55 employees across different divisions Some of the major drawbacks of the study were with respect to the issues of epistemology where there are concerns regarding sincerity and honesty in the responses of the employees For example the employees may not be honest in their replies due to the concerns of job security or

confidentiality of the data. However this was overcome to some extent by building rapport with the employees during the interviews as well as using simple questions in the surveys along with assuring that the responses will be solely used for the academic purpose and kept anonymous of employee names. Some of the other drawbacks were with regards to the time constraints during interviews as the employees had to report back to their work which made it more challenging to gather detailed information along with gaining rapport. However employees were allowed to fill the survey questionnaires in their own free time and company time with the line manager help. Also, some of the questions prepared for the survey were difficult and hence I had simplified them after conducting the pilot study so that all the participants can understand the terms.

#### **5.4 Future Scope for Further Study**

This research is limited to only one organisation that is HCA, Ireland. Also, due to time constraints the research sample chosen was small including 55 survey questionnaires and 5 semi-structured interviews. Hence there is great scope for future study on the similar subject using larger sample and more number of health sector organisations within Ireland in order to gain more generalised results.

**Appendix 1**  
**Questionnaire**

Dear participants,

Thank you for your support and time. The survey is on the topic **‘The effect on employees’ Work-Life Balance at Health Care Alliance (HCA), Ireland during recession times’**. This survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes and participation is purely voluntary. The data gathered from the study is purely for academic purposes and every participant has the right to withdraw from the research at any point of time, if you feel uncomfortable or unethical. Your responses will be maintained highly confidential and data is purely used for academic purposes only. If you have any questions at any time about the purpose of the survey or procedures, please feel free to contact me by email at [omolaraeleshin@yahoo.com](mailto:omolaraeleshin@yahoo.com).

Thank you for your interest in participating in this survey. Please start the below survey.

**Please answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate box.**

1 Please indicate your gender?

Male                       Female

2 Please indicate your age group?

18 – 25                       26 - 35                       36 - 45                       46 - 59

Above 60

3 Please specify your marital status

Single                       Married                       Divorced                       Married (with children)                       others

4 Please indicate your education level?

- Undergraduate       Postgraduate       High Diplomas  
 PhD       Secondary School       Other

5 Which group indicates your length of employment at HSE (in years)

- Less than 1 year       1 - 5 years       6 - 10 years  
 More than 10 years

6 Please specify your current role at the organisation?

7 Please tick your current working patterns, where appropriate?

- Full time       Part time       Morning shift  
 Evening shift       Regular shift       Flexible

8 Please indicate your opinions on work-life balance practices at HCA on the basis of Likert scale where (1) strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) strongly Agree

**Work life balance practices at HCA**

<b>Please circle appropriate number</b>					
(1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree					
(A) Do you think HCA focus on providing work-life balance for its employees?	1	2	3	4	5
(B) In your opinion, HCA's work culture emphasis on development and implemented of effective work-life balance practices	1	2	3	4	5

(C)There are effective strategies that support the work-life balance practices	1	2	3	4	5
(D)The implemented work-life balance practices created meaning for employees' work and motivated to perform better	1	2	3	4	5
(E)In your opinion, you able to balance your work life and personal life activities effectively with the current working patterns?	1	2	3	4	5
(E)The lack of work-life balance resulted in increase of absenteeism and created high work pressure and intensity?	1	2	3	4	5
(F)HCA implement and encourage work-life balance practices like flexible working, health and pension schemes, study and job breaks, job sharing, leave plans, voluntary working times, e-working, and teleworking,	1	2	3	4	5
(G)The change in the working patterns at HCA could bring more flexibility in balancing your work and personal life roles effectively	1	2	3	4	5
(H)Overall, work-life balance is at the heart of HCA	1	2	3	4	5

**Work life balance practices at HCA during recession times**

**Question 9**

<b>Please circle appropriate number</b>					
(1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree					
(A)In your opinion, HCA actively promoted work-life balance during recession times	1	2	3	4	5
(B)There is great increase in the work pressure and work load during	1	2	3	4	5

recession times due to budget cuts?					
(C)There is decrease in pay or cuts in benefits during recession times?	1	2	3	4	5
(D)You were able to balance both your work life and personal life activities effectively during recession times?	1	2	3	4	5
(E)HCA provided excellent flexible conditions to manage work intensity during recession times	1	2	3	4	5
(F)You were asked to work extra hours on many occasions during recession in order to reduce operational costs?	1	2	3	4	5
(G)Job targets were pressurized and stressful during recession times	1	2	3	4	5
(H)You felt secure about your job during recession	1	2	3	4	5

**Impact of Work-life balance on employees**

**Question 10**

<b>Please circle appropriate number</b>					
(1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree					
(A)There was increase in work pressures and intensity for every employee during recession	1	2	3	4	5
(B)There were great number of employee lay-offs across the organization and this created sense of job insecurity	1	2	3	4	5
(C)There was increase in your absenteeism due to high workloads and	1	2	3	4	5

inability to manage work and personal life roles	
(D)Management was very supportive in the recession times with good and healthy communication	1    2    3    4    5
(E)You are department had experienced great number of redundancies during recession	1    2    3    4    5
(F)The lack of work-life balance results in employee de-motivation and low commitment towards organisational goals	1    2    3    4    5

9 Please indicate your opinion on the work-life balance practices and your personal experience during recession times?

10 Overall are you happy with the work life balance and employee engagement provided at your organisation during recent on-going recession Please elaborate in detail?

11 If given an opportunity, what changes would you make to the work life balance practices provided at HCA?

Thank you,

## **Appendix Two**

### **Interview Schedule**

#### Interview Schedule

1. Please specify your current job position in the organisation?

Answer: I work as Clerical Officer.

2. How old are you? And please specify your marital status?

Answer: I am 46 years old, married mother of two.

3. What is your working pattern whether part time or full time? And is it morning or evening shift?

Answer: I work mornings shift only on part time basis.

4. During recent ongoing recession have your working shifts been constant or was there any inflexible working hours?

Answer: Yes my working hours has been constant, although due to absenteeism I have been asked to work I the afternoons if I could.

5. Are you able to balance your work life and personal life effectively with the current working patterns?

Answer: Oh yes, to a large extent.

6. Do you think change in the working pattern could bring more flexibility in balancing your work and home? Please specify your preferences in terms of attaining flexible working?

Answer: I don't really know because it suits me to work mornings and I am.

7. During ongoing recession did you face any situation where your pay was cut or reduced?

Answer: oh yes every here in HSE had pay cut either directly or indirectly for example pension pay cut.

8. Were you asked to work extra hours on any occasion during recession and were you paid for the extra hours fairly?

Answer: Yes and on so many occasions I have been asked to work extra hours and got paid, but can't really say it's fair as I am happy I have my job.

9. How did you find the job targets during recession were they stressful and pressurized?

Answer: Very much stressful and seriously pressured as some of the staffs on maternity leave, sick leave were not replaced and we have been asked to cover them.

10. Was there any change in the organisational structure during recession? How did this impact you with respect to your pay, work life balance and professional work relations?

Answer: No major organisational change but I can say that as a result of been called to cover due to shortage of staff my work and life balance have sometimes being altered.

11. Was the management supportive during the recession? Was there good and healthy communication between the management and staff?

Answer: NO, NO communication as management are just keeping quiet.

12. Did you feel secure about your job during recession?

Answer: Initially I felt unsecure because I was not permanent but now I feel ok as I am permanent now.

13. At your department or branch did you experience any redundancies during recession?

Answer: Not really what we encountered was some sort of let go of employees who was close to retirement.

14. Were you given chance to work from home during recession in order to attain flexibility during extended working hours?

Answer: NO not at all

15. Overall are you happy with the work life balance and employee engagement provided at your organisation during recent ongoing recession.

Answer: No not happy as such everyone is stretched and stressed as a result of work load.

16. If given an opportunity, what changes would you make to the work life balance practices provided during recession? Can't say for recession

Interview Schedule:

1. Please specify your current job position in the organisation? I am currently working as a Clerical Officer Grade 4 in the Health Service Executive.

2 How old are you? And please specify your marital status? I am 40 years of age and separated

3 What is your working pattern whether part time or full time? And is it morning or evening shift? I work full time at the moment

4 During recent ongoing recession have your working shifts been constant or was there any inflexible working hours? I don't work shift hours, there may be times when I have to work late to meet demands

5 Are you able to balance your work life and personal life effectively with the current working patterns? I can't really say as pressure at work is increasing every day, due to shortage of staff or another thing

6 Do you think change in the working pattern could bring more flexibility in balancing your work and home? Please specify your preferences in terms of attaining flexible working? Very possible I would prefer to work mornings if I have choice which I could but not in the present state of economy which impacts on the organisation I think

7 During ongoing recession did you face any situation where your pay was cut or reduced? not really, all I can say is the general pay cut in HSE

8 Were you asked to work extra hours on any occasion during recession and were you paid for the extra hours fairly? Not paid, I am on the flexi system which allows 6 hours, but I understand that we may be getting paid now as the flexi system does not exceed 6pm everyday but if we work past 6pm we may get paid in the near future

9 How did you find the job targets during recession were they stressful and pressurized?

Really very stressful and couple with the fact that there is no intake of employees

10 Was there any change in the organisational structure during recession? How did this impact you with respect to your pay, work life balance and professional work relations? there is a huge restructuring coming up, at the moment employee absence, maternity leave etc does not allow me to take leave on some days I wish to because there is no cover for me so it generally impact on balancing sometimes

11 Was the management supportive during the recession? Was there good and healthy communication between the management and staff? Well, they are trying to cut cost so sometimes I can say they are very supportive Talking about communication, I know that immediate managers are not really communicating well

12 Did you feel secure about your job during recession? Yes because I have currently permanent

13 At your department or branch did you experience any redundancies during recession? No

14 Were you given chance to work from home during recession in order to attain flexibility during extended working hours? No

15 Overall are you happy with the work life balance and employee engagement provided at your organisation during recent ongoing recession Can't really say I am happy

16 If given an opportunity, what changes would you make to the work life balance practices provided during recession? Encourage work life balance so that when recession goes employees with talent will not be eager to leave the job

## Interview Schedule

Please specify your current job position in the organisation? I work as a clerical officer grade four in health service executive

2 How old are you? And please specify your marital status? I am 39 years old and married

3 What is your working pattern whether part time or full time? And is it morning or evening shift? I work full time and no shift

4 During recent ongoing recession have your working shifts been constant or was there any inflexible working hours? No

5 Are you able to balance your work life and personal life effectively with the current working patterns? Yes

6 Do you think change in the working pattern could bring more flexibility in balancing your work and home? Please specify your preferences in terms of attaining flexible working? Yes I don't have preference as long as it suit but maybe to work mornings only

7 During ongoing recession did you face any situation where your pay was cut or reduced? Yes

8 Were you asked to work extra hours on any occasion during recession and were you paid for the extra hours fairly? Yes

9 How did you find the job targets during recession were they stressful and pressurized?  
Stressful and very pressurised and the management are expecting us to cope with pressure by not making mistakes

10 Was there any change in the organisational structure during recession? How did this impact you with respect to your pay, work life balance and professional work relations? Yes, if someone is off, I get to cross cover so can't take my days off for annual leave or even flexi leave

11 Was the management supportive during the recession? Was there good and healthy communication between the management and staff? yes, but no good communication

12 Did you feel secure about your job during recession? yes

13 At your department or branch did you experience any redundancies during recession? No

14 Were you given chance to work from home during recession in order to attain flexibility during extended working hours? No

15 Overall are you happy with the work life balance and employee engagement provided at your organisation during recent ongoing recession Yes

16 If given an opportunity, what changes would you make to the work life balance practices provided during recession? none

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