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## WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES IN JORDANIAN TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES

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### Abstract

No published work is available on work-life balance (WLB) programs in Jordan. Drawing on the methodology of Critical Realism, interviews with ten senior managers, and case studies in two large telecommunication companies were undertaken. WLB practices had both similarities and differences from those in developed countries. WLB policy and practice was constructed within three main areas: social and cultural practices; financial practices; leave arrangements. In comparison with developed countries, social practices such as praying time, Hajj leave and Ramadan concessions reflected the culture and religion of Jordan as an Arabic, Islamic country. Flexible practices, such as compressed working and paternity leave did not exist. The absence of these practices was also linked to social and cultural factors, as well to levels of current economic development. However, part-time working was developed primarily to benefit employers, rather than employees, in contrast to most developed countries. Employers' reasons for adopting WLB practices were the level of competition in the labour market, government regulations, social and culture norms of society, pressures from women in the workforce, and pressure from labour unions. Financial practices were linked to the competitive market, reflecting the need to retain well-qualified staff. Financial benefits including subsidized childcare, paid study leave, and family health insurance, were reported to have the strongest positive impact on organisational morale and staff retention.

**Keywords:** Work-Life-Balance, Jordan, Qualitative Research, Critical Realism, Arab Culture, Telecommunications

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### 1. Introduction: Concepts of Work-Life Benefits

Work-Life Benefits (WLB) aiming to help employees balance demands of home, family, leisure and work in ways which try to maximise employee satisfaction, are well-developed in Western countries (Poelman *et al.* 2013). Sometimes these benefits (e.g. paid maternity leave) are required by legislation (Den-Dulk *et al.* 2012), but often employers themselves initiate such benefits, or grant them in response to employee requests (Burchielli *et al.* 2008), since WLBs

can enhance employee satisfaction, increase productivity, and reduce turnover. This is especially important when highly skilled labour is in short supply (Metcalf, 2007).

This has led to organisations developing more flexible working arrangements (Wise and Bond, 2003). There is another implication for globalisation, in the need to increase the skill level of workers, including those with competing family commitments (Poelmans and Caligiuri, 2008). In the past three decades employers, employees and governments in developed and developing countries have recognized (sometimes unwillingly) the need to address these issues, especially as higher proportions of women enter the workforce (Gambles *et al.* 2007; Lewis *et al.* 2007).

The WLB practices identified in previous Western studies include: Working time arrangement designed to give workers greater flexibility in scheduling hours of work by using part-time working, flexible working hours, compressed work weeks, home-working, term-time working, limited number of annual hours, and job sharing practices; Flexible leave arrangements such as practices reducing working hours to provide time for family care or personal needs, including vacations, illness, maternity, paternity, parental leave, emergency leave, short-term leave to care for a sick child; Financial Allowances that assist workers to manage care for their dependents, including on-site and off-site child care, elder care arrangements, employee assistance programmes, fee-sponsored referral services, and various subsidised well-being programmes (Poelmans *et al.* 2013).

Such benefits have the aim (in their Western development) of enhancing employee well-being, in order to provide for the needs of personnel, and to improve organisational outcomes (Giardini and Kabst, 2008). The motivations of employers in offering such benefits are varied, and generally reflect self-interest, rather than benevolence (Gambles *et al.* 2007). These various issues are explored in the context of a developing industry, in a developing country.

## 2. Previous Studies of WLB in Developing Countries

Among the few research studies of such practices in developing countries are those of Wang *et al.* (2008), who investigated the WLB practices in India, Kenya, and China, indicating that WLB practices frequently differed from those in developed countries. For instance, both Wang *et al.* (2008) and Heinen and Mulvaney (2008) found that WLB practice frequently responded to concerns about family health insurance, retirement plans, subsidised education for children where state welfare systems are not well-developed. Little previous research on WLB in any Arabic country can be identified (Aycan and Eskin, 2005; Al-Hamadi *et al.* 2007). Our own work on the nature, development and impact of WLB in two telecommunication companies in Palestine is relevant (Abubaker, 2015). However, although Jordan is an Arabic country like Palestine, in which Islamic cultural norms prevail, the history and political setting of Jordan introduces some novel features in describing and analysing WLBs, which we explore in the present research. We did expect, however, to replicate the findings of Aladwan *et al.* (2014) on the lack of development and unsystematic application of human resource management practices in Jordan, in a field of rapid economic development, high staff turnover, and marked competition for skilled and professional workers.

The research we report below is based on extended interviews with ten senior managers in two Jordanian telecommunications companies. For “diplomatic” reasons we accessed a sample of nine men and one woman who occupied key managerial posts in the Jordanian telecommunications sector, but were unable to extend the work to employees of junior managers. The senior managers who in this research describe and implement forms of WLB practice in Jordan (in a similar period to the work carried out by Aladwan *et al.*, 2014) offer us a starting point within the critical realist paradigm, of gaining both an objective and a subjective understanding of the significance of implementing WLB policy and practice. The research interviews (conducted in Arabic by the first author) did not attempt to test any hypotheses, since we felt that the field is not yet developed enough for quantitative research which this model might require. Rather, we used a qualitative approach with our sample in an attempt to generate hypotheses for future work. The broad research question posed was: What is the role and impact of WLB practices in selected Jordanian organisations? We wanted to

know why the key informants had adopted or were considering, certain WLB practices, and what their overall perceptions and values were in relation to these practices.

### 3. Jordan: The Research Setting

Jordan, population about eight millions, is a Middle Eastern country bordered by Palestine, Israel, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Its historical importance stems from being at the "cross roads" where trade routes from Asia, Europe and Africa converged. The port of Al-Aqaba provides access to the Red Sea and Egypt. This key location leads to the Kingdom of Jordan being regarded as a gateway to the Middle East (OECD, 2013). Certainly Jordan is well placed to trade both with North Africa and the rest of the world and this fact has increased attractiveness to international companies and investors. By 2013 Jordan had a literacy rate in both sexes surpassing 95 percent (UNDP, 2014). Both genders attend schools and state universities free of charge. There are also internationally-renowned private schools and universities that charge fees.

A quarter of women are employed full-time: the trend for women to enter the external work force is rapidly changing, and many of the employed women in paid employment are graduates (OECD, 2013). Economic and technological expansion has greatly expanded the demand for an educated work force, and women are increasingly filling these roles, social changes which implications for WLB have offered by employers.

Foreign investment has steadily increased with firms such as Orange, Coca Cola, and Nestlé investing in the kingdom. Foreign direct investment in Jordanian enterprises amounted to about US\$3 billion in 2011 (Ghunmi *et al.* 2013; OECD, 2013). By 2015 Jordan had become an economic leader in the Middle East, a member of the European-Mediterranean Free Trade Area. In the UN Human Development Survey (UN, 2014) Jordan was reported as having "high human development" in terms of education, health and life expectancy, income levels and income distribution, and environmental protection. Tourism accounts for about 15 percent of national income. "Health tourism" is another growth industry, given the high quality of Jordan's medical facilities. Following reforms introduced after 1999, economic and technological progress in Jordan has rapidly advanced (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007; OECD, 2013). Jordan is a regional leader in the telecommunication and information technology marketing, a sector which is expected to recruit an additional 18,000 highly skilled workers by 2020.

Jordan's modernization implies that organisations have to consider implementing WLB policy and practice familiar in developed countries, in ways which both adapt to local values and expectations, and which can retain highly skilled workers, such as women professionals who are in increasing demand (Abubaker, 2015). However, no study dealing with the topic of WLB practices in Jordan can be located.

Most of the Jordanian people (98%) are of Arabic ethnicity, the majority being Sunni Muslim (92%) and Arabic speakers (Badran, 2005). A collectivist culture rather than an individualistic one prevails: for example, obligations to care for extended kin are strong. The atomistic society of the west with its nuclear families is uncommon in the Arab world (Heinen and Mulvaney, 2008). Family members usually live in shared households with parents and grandparents, with the extended family living close enough to assist each other. Arabic norms are reflected in gender roles, with men traditionally being "bread-winners", women's main role being "family management" (Whiteoak *et al.* 2006).

An increasing emphasis on the education of women, as demanded by employers seeking skilled personnel, has led to gradual changes in the pattern of family life in the Arab world (Sidani, 2005). There are now many new indications of individualism such as lower birth rates, and more young people living apart from families (Whiteoak *et al.* 2006). Despite this, the movement of women into work roles traditionally held by men is not fully accepted in Arab culture (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007).

Among Arabic practices which remain strong in Jordan is that of *wasta*, or favouritism (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). This gives preferential access in employment and benefits, to for example older applicants (given the general deference to elders), to women (given cultural and religious norms on the protection and care of women), and to those who hold similar

values. These practices, reflecting both Arabic values and Islamic tradition, influence employment programmes in recruitment and monetary compensation, as well as in other aspects of organisational reward systems (Abuznaid, 2006; Abubaker, 2015).

Jordanian labour laws have developed only since the new phase of economic expansion since 1999, and generally focus upon minimum wages, annual paid leave, child allowances, and special conditions for women workers. An employer with at least 20 married female workers is "required" to provide a suitable place for employee's children up to the age of four years. One study investigating this practice in small organisations found that many employed a maximum 19 women (Metcalf, 2007).

In the present study, the research focuses, *inter alia*, on adherence of two large organisations to the guiding laws and regulations which aim to manage labour relations in the Jordan. These include a maximum working week of 48 hours spread over six days, with breaks for meals and prayer (the free day is normally Friday, the day of compulsory Mosque attendance for males in Islam). Each worker in a large organisation is (formally, although not always in practice) entitled to 28 days of paid leave per year, and 14 days paid sick leave per annum. Paid maternity leave is for 10 weeks. Women on return to work after maternity leave are entitled to an hour's paid leave per day, for one year, for breast-feeding. Unpaid leave of a year with the right of return to work must be provided if a new mother requests this. Leave must also be given for travel to The Hajj pilgrimage. These rather generous rights, when given to workers in larger organisations reflect the Islamic nature of the culture, which holds that women in general, and mothers in particular are deserving of special support. However, as the research interviews in the present study show, there is some laxity in the observance and enforcement of these Labour Laws.

#### **4. Chosen Methodology: Critical Realism**

Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are necessary to achieve the fullest picture of the nature and delivery of developing policies such as Work-Life Balance (WLB). The present study applies a qualitative approach to research with a small (but crucially important within the organisation) sample of ten senior managers, in two telecommunication companies.

The chosen research model is grounded within the Critical Realist approach to understanding phenomena, an increasingly popular and effective research model in investigating business organisations (Edwards *et al.* 2014). In this model there are complementary and interlocking ontological assumptions that may be utilised in order to understand the reality of the phenomenon (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2006; Bhaskar, 2010). *Critical Reality* is 'constructed' from the researcher's perception and analysis of the subjectivity of the research participants, and is analysed by the researcher as a consequence of the interplay of their individual perspectives, their life histories, and the prevailing reality, or social structure.

The realist researcher uncovers knowledge by naming and describing broad, generative mechanisms. In other words, the validity is a 'contingent validity' whereby the researcher has developed a 'family of answers' that cover several contingent contexts and reflects different participants, albeit imperfectly (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.152).

Neither positivism nor social constructivism provides an ontology that is capable of reflecting the actual 'reality' of WLB practices, and their genesis within organisations. Social constructivism may regard 'reality' to be synonymous with the values and beliefs of social actors, but in doing so fails to recognise existing realities, nor is it capable of determining the 'reality' of how for example organisations are experienced objectively in the labour market; is it be able to give an account of reasons for adopting particular WLB practices – problems which Critical Realism seeks to avoid (Fleetwood and Hesketh, 2006; Sobh and Perry, 2006). "Mixed methods" in this model, is a preferred approach to HRM issues (Kiessling and Harvey, 2005). Furthermore, Critical Realism can be a particularly appropriate methodology when the research setting is intertwined with a strong religious culture, such as Islam (Wilkinson, 2013).

## **5. The Interview Process and Validity Issues**

The interviews were face-to-face with each manager, lasting for approximately an hour. We began by raising topics as well as presenting new ideas in order to elicit the responses on how and why they constructed their social world in terms of Work Life Benefits for employees. The lead researcher encountered a certain reluctance to co-operate by some managers, particularly in the second company. Even so the researcher was able to elicit a wealth of data from the ten interviews. The 'saturation point' was reached in each Case after five interviews – the point when there was a feeling that fresh data seemed to be unlikely, or irrelevant (Maxwell, 2005).

All of the managers interviewed had been in their current post for at least four years. All senior managers were potentially available to the researcher. All were male, apart from one female manager in Case Study One. The male research interviewer was an experienced HRM professional, and held a faculty position in a Middle Eastern Management Faculty. The declared aim of the research for interviewees was to educate the researcher on the nature and administration of the company's WLB policy and practice.

## **6. Results from the Two Case Studies: WLB Profiles**

Using codes derived from textual analysis of Arabic-language interviews translated into English, the researchers identified three kinds of WLB practices (and sometimes their absence) in the two Case Studies. These are shown in Table 1.

According to Table 1, the company in Case Study One was somewhat more generous in WLB provision, providing subsidized child-care, subsidy for family for sports centre membership, and paid Hajj (Makkah pilgrimage) leave. Case Study Two company allowed employees to go on this once-a-lifetime pilgrimage for up to a month, but as unpaid leave.

For definitions and scope of these WLB policies, the reader is directed to the references in the right hand column. In the next two sections we highlight both similarities and differences in the approach of the two companies, and how key managers viewed or interpreted WLB practices. It should be emphasized that each company was keen to recruit, and retain, skilled personnel in a competitive jobs market on Jordan at the time of the research.

## **7. Findings from the Interview Data of the First Telecommunications Company**

Since its launch in 2005, this company has been able to expand into the Jordanian mobile market, achieving a high penetration. The company has proved to be a key player in one of the highly competitive telecommunications markets in the Arabic region. By the end of the first quarter of 2006, the company customer base had reached an unprecedented number of over 500,000 subscribers, all within six months. By 2010, in comparison with the competitors in the mobile Jordanian market, the company held a market share of 22 percent. The company in 2013 retained over 300 employees, 95 percent of whom were Jordanian. The percentage of women in the workforce is around 30 percent.

Workers have a formal right (under Labour Law) to 28 days annual holiday, 15 days sick leave, and 70 days maternity leave. On Leave Arrangement practices, the HR Manager of the first company pointed to employees' right to take 28 days of annual paid vacation (granted in both companies), and is comparable with the practice of many international organisations working in Jordan.

**Table 1. The nature of identified WLB practices in the two companies**

	The WLB Practice	Code of Type of WLB Practice	Available Case1/ Case2	Reference for description of WLB practices
1.	Annual hours	Flexible practices	NO/NO	Perry-Smith and Blum (2000)
2.	Job Sharing	Flexible practices	NO/NO	Burchielli <i>et al.</i> (2008)
3.	Term time working	Flexible practices	NO/NO	Lewis (1997)
4.	Working at home	Flexible practices	NO/NO	Konrad and Mangel, (2000)
5.	Part time working	Flexible practices	YES/YES	Guest, <i>et al.</i> (2003)
6.	Flexitime work	Flexible practices	NO/NO	Wise and Bond (2003)
7.	Compressed work	Flexible practices	NO/NO	Wise and Bond (2003)
8.	Unpaid study leave	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Doherty (2004)
9.	Paid and unpaid vacation	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Doherty (2004)
10.	Paid breast feeding leave	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Roberts <i>et al.</i> (2005)
11.	Emergency leave	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Wang, <i>et al.</i> (2008)
12.	Emergency vacation	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Giardini and Kabst (2008)
13.	Paid/unpaid paternity leave	Leave arrangement	NO/NO	Giardini and Kabst (2008)
14.	Paid maternity leave	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Doherty (2004)
15.	Paid/unpaid sick leave	Leave arrangement	YES/YES	Giardini and Kabst (2008)
16.	Childcare centre	Financial practices	YES/NO	Dex and Smith, (2002)
17.	Subsidised study leave	Financial practices	YES/YES	Wang and Walumbwa (2007)
18.	Subsidised- child education	Financial practices	NO/NO	Wang and Walumbwa (2007)
19.	Subsidised-Health insurance	Financial practices	YES/YES	Wang and Walumbwa (2008)
20.	Subsidised for mobile line	Financial practices	YES/YES	Maxwell <i>et al.</i> (2007)
21.	Cost of membership sport-centre	Financial practices	YES/NO	Maxwell <i>et al.</i> (2007)
22.	Cost of one month family holiday	Financial practices	YES/NO	Maxwell <i>et al.</i> (2007)
23.	Personal phone call at work	Social and cultural	YES/YES	Maxwell <i>et al.</i> (2007)
24.	Personal visitors at work	Social and cultural	YES/YES	Heinen and Mulvaney (2008)
25.	Praying time break	Social and cultural	YES/YES	Heinen and Mulvaney (2008)
26.	Ramadan-work-hour reduction	Social and cultural	YES/YES	Heinenand Mulvaney (2008)
27.	Bereavement/wedding leave	Social and cultural	YES/YES	Heinen and Mulvaney (2008)
28.	Paid Hajj vacation	Social and cultural	YES/NO	Heinen and Mulvaney (2008)

None of the managers indicated the existence of paternity leave, which was seen as inappropriate in an Arabic culture. The Financial Manager observed: *What is the point of paternity practice? Who looks after his wife on such occasion?* But the Sales Manager, a woman, said: *I wish that could happen, but this would entail a change in the mentality of men before being able to ask the employer to implement such special provisions.* In Arabic culture men are not expected to provide 'domestic assistance' for women who are expected to be supported either by extended family or by other women, particularly during pregnancy, childbirth, and afterwards. It is rare to see men staying at home, helping a wife with family matters.

All participants pointed to practices within the company that could be classified as Social WLB practices. Cultural and religious factors may oblige employers to offer these to enable individuals to manage working and personal lives. The HR Manager stated: *Yes, the policy of HR considers the culture and religion factors in setting practices. We have a praying room for workers within the organisation.* The Procurement manager also stated that: *We offer additional practices that are essential in most of the Arabic region, such as break for praying time. There is a room available for this purpose.*

Under Social WLB policies several practices are supported such as a half hour prayer-time break, reduced work-hours during Ramadan (the month of fasting, ending the day at 1 pm rather than 4 pm), bereavement leave for up to three days, personal phone calls and personal visitors at work, and one month's paid leave for each employee going on the Hajj pilgrimage during his or her lifetime.

The coding analysis identified a group of WLB practices under the heading of *Financial Matters*. In terms of WLB, interviewees indicated that there were many financial WLB practices available to workers, as recorded in Table 1. These are seen by the managers in Company One to be the most important type of WLB practice they offered. The Financial Manager remarked that: *In one meeting the employees expressed a desire to increase their salary, and for the employer to provide private health insurance for the whole family... We have pressure to increase our contribution to 100% of the cost of childcare centre rather than the present 50%. We now offer free private health care insurance to all employees.*

The organization had only recently offered childcare facilities. The Administrative Manager stated that there were many additional benefits for employees in achieving a balance between working life and family responsibilities, including a free mobile telephone line with 1500 free minutes for each employee and their spouse; subsidized family trips for one month abroad; and family membership of a sport centre for all employees. The Financial and HR Managers said that rather than merely following regulations, or cultural values within Jordan, these benefits also achieved the purpose of maintaining morale and retaining good employees. He commented: *We look to the HR policies of our major competitors ...* He mentioned that his company had joined an association of telecom organizations in Jordan on maintaining "excellent" employee conditions.

One of the aims of this association was indeed to seek a common code of practice with respect to WLB practices, a "benchmark" for all existing and prospective telecommunication companies. The Procurement and Sales Managers both indicated that a private limited company must be concerned about the reputation of the organisation, including its reputation as an employer, otherwise investors and customers might go to their competitors.

The researcher's impression was that competition (and fear of competition) was the reason behind the implementation of WLB practices, and for the setting up of a form of oligopoly which limited competition for scarce labour resources. The association 'obliged' members to apply particular practices, and after its formation competition for labour between members of the association had declined, but has increased in respect of competition with other businesses who employed professional and skilled workers. It is our inference from the case study and interview material that the creation of the association of telecommunication companies in Jordan has established a tacit understanding with regard to which WLB practices to promote, and which to leave unimplemented.

However, the company in Case One did offer somewhat higher levels of benefits than Case Two, suggesting that they were straining the limits of the telecommunications company

clique. When the researcher enquired why more benefits were offered, the response was that these created the ability to attract skilled workers, and to retain them once employed. That this is the case is supported by the practice within this organisation of giving one month's unpaid leave for any worker who is thinking of resigning.

Labour Unions play some role in the implementation of WLB practices, but they are more likely to be concerned with increasing financial incentives and rates of remuneration, rather than improving other practices. Company One had a full-time union representative on site. The HR and Procurement Managers remarked: *What is the point of them [the unions] exerting pressure because more practices are offered than in other organisations, and ours are more than those which have been demanded by the employees.*

But the Administrative manager, as well as others, indicated that the Labour Unions applied pressure regarding the general employment strategy of the organisation. This was apparent in the case of an attempted collaborative arrangement with the Zain Company. The Labour Unions insisted that in order for there to be an alliance between the telecom companies, it was necessary to provide certain incentives for employees.

Women constitute about 30 percent of the labour force, and there are a number of women in mid and high positions in Company One. Even so the interviewees did not indicate any pressure from women in respect of WLB practices. The female Sales Manager observed: *The HR policies of the company had been established at the inception of the organisation, irrespective of whether there were or were not women in the workplace at that time.*

The Financial manager also indicated that the policy of providing childcare facilities had existed from the start of the organisation. He asserted that the implementation of this practice resulted from pressure from the company's board of directors. The directors' believed that: *The implementation of childcare facilities feeds back into an increase in profitability and was deemed beneficial for improving the personal achievement of employees.*

The implementation of "child friendly" practice by senior management was based on the recognition of an increase over the years in the number of employees, and particularly of women employees, with young dependents. The intention, as implied in the above quotation, was one of improving both the personal achievement of employees, including women with dependents, and also increasing the level of profitability of the company.

One of the principal reasons why this company chose to implement a system of WLB, and particularly Financial WLB and Social WLB practices, was indicated by the Sales manager: *We are a service organisation rather than manufacturing organisation, the value of our company lies its reputation and customer service.* This general view was also supported by the Administrative and Procurement managers, both of whom indicated that the principal asset of the organisation was its workforce. It is the employee who produces the 'product' of the organisation (the sale of the device, rather than the device itself) and who persuades the customer to use, and keep using, the organisation's services. The policies adopted were, in effect, the only way that the organisation could build and strengthen its position in the marketplace. Manufacturing companies could overcome this problem by producing new handsets and connectivity, but this, in a rapidly advancing field of technology, would be a temporary advantage. The manifest "happiness" of sales and service staff appeared to be a good long-term marketing strategy.

There was clear evidence from interviews on the use of a part-time working strategy to fill the immediate needs of the employer, rather than to meet the demands of the employee as someone having personal responsibilities and who needed to work part-time. In addition, such a strategy was used to enable the company to select its most highly skilled future employees (hiring on as full-time only the most efficient of the part-time workers). This was confirmed by all of the interviewees.

A predominant idea among the participants was that the company had a high reputation in the marketplace for their "generous" WLB practices. These derived in the main from financial WLB practices, and from established social practices. As one manager noted: *Go and ask 'the public', would they like working for our company or not.* The reputation of the company was, according to the managers, more related to benefits and practices which they implemented, rather than their actual telecommunication products.

The female Sales manager added, in reflecting on the introduction of subsidized childcare: *I am happy with this practice, it is the time to find more partners, I mean more women.* The support for childcare also indicated a desire to reduce the turnover of employees with dependents, as the Administrative Manager observed: *One women employee said, 'the time is over for my husband to force me to leave work'.* The HR Manager observed: *I am expecting a reduction in the turnover of women with dependents, but I cannot be sure of this now because the practice of providing childcare is new.*

There were several indications of the esteem that childcare allowances are thought to bring the company in terms of a reduction in turnover of staff. This idea was supported by all participants who stated that it could be observed in the happiness of employees, in reduced emergency leave, and increased informal discussion about such benefits between employees. The participants were also confident that other financial WLB practices also explained the reduction in staff turnover. For example, the Procurement Manager observed: *One of my employees who gained studying leave, speaking with me informally about a competitive offer he had received from one of our competitor companies remarked that he could not let his company down. 'They have paid for my studies and have appreciated me and so I have respect for them.'* He rejected the rival offer.

Financial WLB practices were perceived as having greater impact than other benefits. This was noted by all participants and is supported by a reduction in special leaves requested, and in the general level of commitment of employees. The Administrative Manager remarked: *One employee said: 'this is my home' and said this at 6 o'clock after a normal working day which usually ended at 4 o'clock.* On the creation of childcare facilities, the HR Manager noted in particular a decrease in emergency leave and a reduction in absenteeism among women. He offered the example of three women who used to leave work several times in a week; their behaviour changed dramatically after the implementation of childcare.

The salient nature of WLB in Case Study One are leave arrangements, financial WLB benefits, and religious and cultural practices, but the practice of flexible work was only atypically deployed. Overall, WLB provision reflects managerial policy for maintaining employee morale, satisfaction, and low absenteeism and turnover: the bottom line was clearly the efficient (and profitable) operation of the company. Overall, the reasons for the implementation of WLB derive primarily from government imposed labour law, the reputation sought by the organisation, the need for a stable and profitable enterprise, the influence of international standards (even though this was a locally-owned enterprise), and the practices of competing organisations.

The impact of these practices is reportedly positive with respect to employee attitudes and behaviour, and the company's 'good reputation' in the marketplace. The predominant impact perceived involved the provision of financial benefits, childcare facilities, and part-time working practices.

## 8. Findings from Interviews in Case Study Two

Company Two is a private shareholding company which launched in June 2004 in the Jordanian telecommunications market, offering a new form of telecommunications based on the integrated Digital Enhanced Network (iDEN) technology. It was the first Arab company in the Middle East to introduce this, which combines the ordinary mobile phones with an instantaneous Direct Connect ('walkie-talkie') service. This facility offers a primary Direct Connect service to enable one-to-one, and one-to-many, immediate, real-time communication. There was strong demand for, and acceptance of, this novel form of technology in Jordan. The company has positioned itself as a solid player in the local telecommunication industry. But with the strong competition in the mobile market in Jordan, the company by 2010 still had a relatively small market share (8%) in comparison with the other three competitors – Z (40% market share), O (30%), and U (22%). The company has over 200 employees, 99 percent of whom are Jordanian. Women in the workforce are around 22 percent.

WLB policies emerging in this Case Study covered Leave Arrangements, Social and Cultural WLB practices, Financial WLB practices, and Flexible WLB practices. Comments on the social and cultural WLB practices predominated among all the interviews, and according to

the interviewer's impression these benefits were strongly and sometimes enthusiastically stressed. When the researcher asked about such practices the answer was straightforward from all interviewees: "Of course, yes". The HR manager stated that: *Even during praying time and Ramadan, a reduction in working hours is not available as part of the formal policy of organisation. Such practices are by virtue of common sense, offered both in our organisation and in others.*

These practices are a consequence of Arabic culture society (Heinen and Mulvaney, 2008; Abubaker, 2015). The interviewees indicated that workers have the right under company arrangement to prayer time breaks of half an hour; reduced work-hours during Ramadan; bereavement leave for three days; special, paid wedding leave of up to ten days; and one month's unpaid holiday for employees going on Hajj during their lifetime. The provisions for prayer-time and Ramadan in particular, but also including other socially significant provisions, all derive from an appreciation of cultural values and expectations. While they are formal, in the sense of being instituted across the organisation, they are regarded as 'informal' because they derive neither from Jordanian law nor from any prior established system of WLB practices, but rather from 'what is evident to all' given the context of an Islamic society.

On leave arrangements, employees have the right to several benefits as shown in Table 1. Women are entitled to one hour's reduction in the working day to breast feed, for one year. Paid vacation is 28 days a year, and can be increased without pay. The Administrative and Marketing Managers observed that: *Employees have the right and access to leave practices that are compatible with those laid down in Jordanian Labour Law.* Paternity leave is not available, but both Marketing and Public Relations managers indicated that men could take a maximum of two days for the birth of their child; after that time the extended family could provide the care. The Financial Manager observed that paternity leave in European countries might be essential for the people there given prevailing norms, but not in Jordan. He had studied in Europe, where in general individualism is a characteristic of society, but in an Arabic culture, family roles are prescribed according to gender. *I cannot expect one employee to ask for a long holiday to assist or look after his wife or children. We live with families that can assist us in this regard.*

In terms of flexible working practices, the only one available is part-time working. Similar to the previous Case Study, this is utilised to meet the organisation's strategic needs, and often for short periods of time, rather than being a choice of employees. The HR manager affirmed that: *There is no formal policy or rule within the organisation concerning part-time working. But I used to employ a number of part-time employees at the end of each year as consequence of a heavy workload.*

Further WLB practices described have been categorised in the Financial Assistance category. The HR and Public Relation Managers indicated that the company only gave employees free mobile line use on the company's network. The organisation also offers family private health insurance, and in some cases, subsidised study leave and scholarships for particular workers for studying abroad. These are seen by employers as one of the most important WLB practice. The Administrative Manager observed that: *The more you added financial practices the greater the ability of workers to manage their personal affairs; I mean financial practices are an essential part of WLB for employees.*

The HR manager added that the most requested financial practices were family health insurance, followed by paid studying leave, Hajj vacation, or various financial incentives. These were said to be the principal concerns for employees, rather than other practices such as flexible working practice. Managers observed that men in particular sought longer hours (and higher pay) rather than other forms of benefit (seen as mainly for women), which would reduce working hours.

Jordanian Labour Law encourages employers to accommodate the social and religious needs of workers, but without stipulating many specific requirements. Even so, many Managers indicated that they would apply these to avoid negative consequences for the organisation. The Financial Manager stated: *We could ignore the rules and regulation of government as many organisations do [he indicated that labour law application is weak in Jordan], but I think that that would cost the organisation too much.* Continuing this theme, the Public Relations manager also

remarked that: *We are a big organisation which has many networks both internally and externally. It becomes difficult for me to promote and advertise the organisation in the market place if we do not have a good image.*

The PR Manager indicated that the implementation of leave arrangement and social WLB practices are a result of pressure from the government and from social norms, and he linked this with the reputation of the organisation in the market place. The main reason, however, for the implementation of these practices was neither government rules, nor social requirements, but rather the reputation of the organisation and its competitors in the market place. This could explain the non-existence of childcare allowances, even though under Jordanian law, they are “obligatory” if there are more than 20 women with dependents. The Managers avoided this area of non-compliance, and appeared to assume that such provision would only be necessary if the “public image” of the company was negatively affected.

Rather defensively, the Administrative Manager stated that “we have a contract with two kindergartens off-site, for employees’ children”, and the Finance Manager noted that we “we have off-site facilities” - but employees were responsible for accessing this minimally subsidized facility. What was understood by these comments was that the organisation was concerned about governmental regulations and understood those policies very well, but they also knew that Jordanian law did not oblige organisations to be responsible for implementing these practices unilaterally.

The Financial Manager indicated that: *We can ignore the rules and regulation of the government, as many organisations do.* Furthermore, ignorance of how to organise and implement childcare practices is itself exemplified in the statute: the law makes no specific stipulations as to how childcare is to be provided. There is consequently no standard model which organisations must follow to comply with what is effectively a weak legal obligation. Labour unions in Jordan also remain weak, and focus on direct financial rewards for workers, rather than on the indirect rewards offered by WLB.

Competition was highlighted by most Managers in Case Two as an important reason for implementing WLB, and this is particularly the case with respect to financial WLB practices. For instance, the Administrative Manager indicated that: *The introduction of free mobile minutes and family health insurance derives from the availabilities of these practices in other organisations.* The HR Manager commented: *We are working in a market place that could be categorised as highly competitive ...We have recently offered private health care cover as a consequence of employee demand. We also offered three scholarships last year for highly skilled people in the areas of finance, information technology, and procurement.* These scholarships, in each case, covered the cost of fees and maintenance during a study at universities in Jordan, and as Managers conceded, also had the effect of enhancing skill levels in the company’s workforce.

Since some 22 percent of the workforce is women, the researcher asked the interviewees about the relationship between the existence of women and other employees with young dependants, and the implementation of WLB practices. Two of the interviewees indicated that there was no relationship. The Marketing Manager noted that: *These practices are normally to be found in most well known organisations, whether there are women there or not.*

The researcher was not be able to understand the meaning of ‘normally’ in this reply, as one practice, that of subsidising the cost of children, was desired but certainly not universal, in many organisations in Jordan. Three interviewees indicated that workers with dependents have the right of additional financial benefits, such as family health insurance, and increments in salary. From this the researcher understood that increments in salary were given according to number of dependent children, a practice approved by custom rather than law.

There are patterns which the researchers perceive within the interview data concerning the flexibilities in meeting the needs of women. This pattern was evident in most of the interviews: for instance, the HR Manager stated that: *We normally accept a request from a woman to have holiday or emergency leave, but other employees are more restricted. You can ask [a named employee] who took four emergency leaves last week.*

The named employee is a mother of three children one of whom was ill. Even though this was the reason for her absence it is still not possible to argue that the implementation of

such leave arrangement derived from the women herself or her situation, since such arrangements are, formally speaking, required by the law in Jordan and are common in most organisations. But it is possible to say that there is in Company Case Two a clear appreciation of the role of women as workers, and an aspiration to offer WLB policies which assisted them. But this altruistic motivation was associated with the desire to retain professional women who also had traditional family responsibilities.

The difference between this second case and the first is not that of being local or international – rather, according to the researcher's inference from the two sets of interviews, in Case One the company is more attuned to the international market and to international labour practices, than is the company in Case Two. But the researcher is inclined to agree with the conclusions of the anonymous graduate student, that there is indeed a degree of rigidity in the implementation of leave arrangements, and reduced access to various WLB practices for certain groups of workers, in Case Two.

Most managers regarded Financial WLB practices as having the greatest impact on employee performance. These involved private family health insurance, free mobile lines for employees, and child benefit payments, and other types of financial support. The Marketing Manager and the Administrative Manager noted that: *Employees are happy with these provisions and there has been a corresponding increase in customer satisfaction.* The Administrative manager added that: *Employee contributions to the running of the company have increased in the form of a greater number of positive suggestions as to improvements to the services provided ...*

However, both the Public Relation's and the Administrative Manager declared that: *Employees have the right to leave arrangement, but also we have the right to accept or reject these if it creates a conflict with the demands of work in the company.* The HR Manager also noted, in expressing concern about generous leave policies that: *At the end of each month, accounting departments used to prepare the salaries for all employees. On one occasion three employees from the department were unavailable: one woman on maternity leave, one on sick leave, and one on holiday for three days.*

Financial WLB practices were perceived as having a strong relationship to the contentment felt by employees. This was noted by most participants. For instance, the Marketing Manager remarked: *I was happy to gain an opportunity for study, but I did not expect the company to grant me paid study leave, which they did ... Other employees [told me] that family health insurance had saved them a lot of money. I really appreciated this offer from the company.*

Several of the managerial respondents said that their organization does not discriminate between employees; it merely conducted itself in accordance with the requirements for open competition in order to choose who should be granted an opportunity to study. This view was not fully supported by all respondents, however, and one who requested anonymity remarked that he did not believe that there was any clear system for determining which candidates should be offered paid study leave.

## 9. Conclusions: Comparison of the Two Case Studies

The WLB practices identified in the content analysis of the ten interviews encompass three main areas: Social and cultural WLB, Financial WLB, and Leave Arrangements. One of the interesting findings across both of the Cases is the existence of new practices that have not been highlighted before. These are Social and Cultural WLB practices which deal with the right of employees to have access to personal phone calls, to have personal visitors at work, to be granted praying-time breaks, to have reduced hours of work during Ramadan, to take bereavement leave and wedding leave, and to have a vacation for Hajj, whether paid or unpaid. These practices have emerged as consequences of cultural and religious factors in Jordan and support the claims of Heinen and Mulvaney (2008) that cultural factors in Arabic society might lead to the emergence of WLB practices that do not exist in a western context.

Wang *et al.* (2008) concluded that the impact of cultural factors can also impose the lack of particular practices, such as paternity leave. Indeed, across the two Cases Studies,

Paternity Leave arrangements were non-existent. This is because the emergence of this practice in western culture derives from the acceptance of cross gender role models (Aryeet *et al.* 1998); but this is rare in Jordan, as the social convention is that men are the primary breadwinners with little cross gender transference of roles. This finding supports the previous studies of Paternity Leave in Arabic nations, which are little in demand because men and women still largely restrict themselves to traditional functions (Abuznaid, 2006).

The main financial benefits in both companies were subsidized health insurance, financial allowances for parents, and paid study leave. Other Financial WLB practices identified were the provision of a childcare centre (in one Case Study), free mobile phone calls, subsidized family trips for one month abroad, and membership of sports bodies for the family.

All participants in both cases indicated the non-existence of Flexible WLB practices, except for part-time working. Here this provision was used to increase the number of workers in times of high demand for labor. In one case this practice was used for enabling the company to choose to which of several new trial employees they would offer full-time work. This practice was therefore used to fulfill company requirements rather than being an integral strategy of WLB.

The findings indicate responsiveness by employers to the adoption of WLB practices as consequences of perceived cultural and social factors, and also in response to market factors - rather than as a result of governmental directives. This is particularly so regarding religious matters such as prayer-time breaks, and Hajj. The pressure of social and cultural factors is such that it is not possible for these organisations to ignore them. These practices represent the beliefs and norms of most of Muslim people in the Middle East (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007).

But there is some flexibility concerning the ability of employers to adopt, or to ignore, a reduction in working hours during Ramadan. Such a reduction is not part of Islamic requirements. Nevertheless reduced working hours enable employees to take part in the traditions of Ramadan: individuals have to prepare food after dusk; and there are additional prayers, readings from the Qur'an in the night hours. In addition, individuals who fast from dawn lack energy and concentration by the early afternoon. In terms of other Social WLB practices deriving from social norms and, there is little separation between working life and social life. It is common for workers to be visited by their friends or to call them during the working day. There is no general conception in Arabic society of a part of the day being for work and a part for social life (Whiteoak *et al.* 2006; Budhwar and Mellahi, 2007).

On the other hand, the study's findings indicate a rather weak pressure to implement governmentally defined Leave Arrangements. But the compliance of these organisations was seen to enhance their reputation, their positive public image, and was an implicit marketing strategy. As in Metcalfe's review (2007), we found that there was a degree of 'idiosyncrasy' on the part of the employers in dealing with their workforces, particularly in allocating to particular personnel working hours required, and how individual workers were rewarded. This might be accounted for by the system of *wasta*, an Arabic cultural practice of differentially rewarding workers according to their needs as perceived in the Islamic system of values; and preferring certain religious or ethnic groups within the general employment system. In a study of employees in telecommunication companies in Palestine we did find that *wasta* played a role in how WLB policies were applied (Abubaker, 2015). Since the current study did not interview an employee sample, this cannot be verified in the Jordanian case.

On the impact of women in the workforce in both organisations, findings revealed both self-serving and ambiguous responses. Both organisations insisted that the implementation of WLB practices was an initial policy of each organisation at its inception, as opposed to being the result of demands made by the workforce. But in one Case, childcare facilities were provided, associated with both high costs and managerial time. The only reason for its adoption appears to be that the organisation was aware that by offering to assist women employees, there would be an increase in performance. This implies the existence of a significant impact on the female workforce following the adoption of childcare practices, impacts similar to those found by previous studies (e.g. Thompson *et al.*, 1999). It is clear that women graduates with professional and technical skills are in demand in the telecommunications and other sectors in an economically expanding country, and employers are prepared to provide support which will

help such women balance the demands of 'traditional' family responsibilities, and entering the professional work force. The entry of women into the external labour force represents an important social change in the Arab world, and deserves further study.

Human Relations Management is, according to our case study perspective, more systematic than the overview of Aladwan *et al.* (2014) would imply: but WLB in these two organisations studied offer a certain cultural uniqueness. Moreover, in addressing the religious needs of workers (Mazor, 2015), international corporations in developing countries can according to our case studies, accommodate the aspirations of female workers who wish to balance work and family life (On, 2014).

The limitations of the present study should be stressed. The researchers aimed for the highest levels of manager to interview, choosing to begin with a "top down" sample of ten senior managers. Gaining such access to firms engaged in a seemingly oligopolistic industry was by no means easy, and was gained diplomatically, with the express understanding that we would listen to the managers' "success stories", and not interview more junior line managers responsible for administering HR policies, nor the workers themselves. Future research, as we have achieved in Palestine, must interview managers and workers at all levels if WLB policies and practices are fully assessed. Future research must also combine qualitative and quantitative approaches, as Hayman (2005) and Hayman and Rasmussen (2013) have ably demonstrated in their Australian work.

Finally, we commend the approach of Critical Realism which combines both positivist and 'real life' assumptions, with qualitative techniques for "telling it like it is". Archer (2003), in elaborating the critical realist approach argues that qualitative research paints the picture at 'a still point in time'. The year of this research, 2012, was a 'still point in time' in Jordan's history. Other dynamic factors – further economic expansion, the refugee crisis with an inflow of over 600,000 destitute refugees from Syria, incipient warfare in the Middle East, and market forces—mean that fresh research must build dynamically upon, and not merely replicate, our findings. Jordan has embarked on the path of being "a competitive and strong market economy" (Ahmed, 2013), and through the integration of religious principles in human resource management policy has shown that an Islamic country can offer a model, as Zerban (2013) has urged, for the wider world of business and enterprise.

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