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When work keeps us apart: A thematic analysis of the experience of
business travellers

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When work keeps us apart: A thematic analysis of the experience of business travellers

Whilst business travel is deemed important for organizational success and economic outcomes, little is known about the actual process of business travelling from the perspective of individuals who undertake such travel on a regular basis. Thus the current qualitative study examined how business travellers (three women and eight men) attempt to find a balance between work and family, by focusing on how time together and time apart are experienced. The results can be interpreted and framed within work/family border theory in that business travellers' borders are less defined and less permeable, thus requiring them to border-cross more frequently. This necessitates a process of negotiation with key border-keepers (their spouse/partner). Business travellers also undertake compensatory behaviours to make up for their time away from family. In order to find a work/family balance they go through a process of adapting, negotiating and tailoring their lives around their work commitments to alleviate work-life conflict.

Keywords: business travel, work, family, balance, border theory.

When work keeps us apart: A thematic analysis of the experience of business travellers.

Introduction

Business travel is seen as a catalyst for organizational success but also for national economic growth; with cuts in travel due to the current economic recession being linked to forecasts of diminished business performance (World Travel & Tourism council, N.D). Whilst business travel appears to reap financial benefit for organisations, this may come at a human cost. As travelling for business necessarily equates to short or long-term absences from one's home, individuals may face challenges in meeting the demands of integrating work and family life.

Surprisingly then, there has been little research on the impact of business travel on the individuals or their families; what there is (e.g. Espino, Sundstrom , Frick, Jacobs & Peters, 2002) has taken a largely quantitative perspective. Whilst this literature points to outcomes such as elevated stress, there is a need to understand the processes and experiences of business travelling, too. Business travel and professional mobility has become omnipresent in the 21st century and may entail visiting customers inland or abroad (see WTTC, N.D.), attending meetings, participating in conferences and exhibitions, working at customer sites and so forth. Thus, business travellers may experience irregular and temporary periods of absence from their main work base and

their home as a result of their career or work demands. Although communication technology has improved greatly, the need for face-to-face contact is still seen as necessary to create mutual trust and other such interpretative skills (Aguilera, 2008; Ivancevich et al, 2003), hence today's global economy necessitates (inter)national business travel. It has been argued that as companies and businesses become more global and geographically dispersed there is an increasing demand for business travel (Beaverstock et al, 2009), with some companies exerting 'institutional pressure' on employees to be mobile (Lassen, 2009). Our current study will commence with a review of pertinent existing literature, which highlights some of the potentially detrimental outcomes to individuals. This leads us into the rationale for a qualitative study, which sought to further our understanding of individual's experience, rather than understandings at the organisational level. Contextualising our research in the need for travel in a global economy, we positioned our research in the psychological domain as we set out to explore individual experiences and differences therein; thus we include a brief review of relevant work-life balance frameworks, such as Border Theory (Clarke, 2000).

Existing literature on business travel

It is not an easy feat to define what exactly business travel is, and what the potential outcomes are. Existing research has tended to focus on business travel from an organisational point of view (Striker et al, 1999; Espino et al, 2002), in order to inform company policies or management practices. Indeed, there are other occupations that have long been associated with marital separation, for example military personnel, salesman, airline pilots and long-distance lorry drivers. Studies using such samples

have focused on commuter/dual-career relationships or long-distance relationships (Blake, 1996; Harris et al, 2002; O’Dorisio & O’Dorisio, 2003; Rhodes, 2002; Morris, 1995; Schneider & Waite, 2005; Tessina, 2008), where couples see each other on weekends. Couples who choose to live separately; a term coined ‘Living Apart Together’ (Levin 2004, Levin & Trost, 1999; Nicholas, 2008; Nicholas & Brown, 2009; Roseneil, 2006; Trost, 1998 & 2003) have also received limited attention. However, we can use existing literature in these areas to begin to inform us about the psychological, emotional and behavioural impact of business travel on individuals and their families. Some business travel studies do exist, however, they have tended to be organisation (Espino et al, 2002; Lassen, 2009) or occupation specific (Hubinger et al, 2002) or used mainly quantitative research methods (Striker et al, 1999; Gustafson, 2006). Nearly two decades ago, Gerstel & Gross (1984) argued that commuter marriages illustrated how economic system’s demand for mobile workers clashes with traditional patterns of shared family cohabitation. Unlike commuter marriages, where spouses live apart usually because of the locations of their jobs and who regularly travel to be together (e.g. weekends), business travel is irregular, often at short notice and requires additional juggling of work and family commitments. In summary, business travel is characterised by a necessity for mobility and flexibility, and requires absence from the home and regular place of work at regular or irregular intervals.

Potential benefits and pitfalls of mobility and flexibility

Potential benefits of mobility/flexibility may be career development opportunities or financial gain, where organisations reward workers who literally and figuratively ‘go the extra mile’ with benefits, bonuses and increased salaries. More generally, the opportunity to work flexibly may improve individual’s ability to integrate work and

family, for example being able to work from home at times. Business travellers need to balance work obligation and career aspirations on the one hand and family obligations on the other in order to minimise conflict (Gustafson, 2006). This may be difficult in view of the irregular nature of business travel as well as the varying notice period given for business travel to take place, which may make it difficult to put long-term and regular arrangements in place, and/ or meet family and social commitments. Clark and Farmer (1998) argue that work primarily satisfies the ends of providing an income and giving a sense of accomplishment, while home life satisfies the ends of attaining close relationships and personal happiness. Indeed, individuals may find a sense of accomplishment in the home place without any financial rewards.

Business travel undoubtedly brings both benefits and sacrifices for travellers and there is a strong relationship between income and travel activity (Gustafson, 2006), possibly as a result of their status within the company. One such sacrifice may be periods away from family or working during ‘family-time’. Time away from family may bring added stress and strain, especially if business travellers have children (Espino et al, 2002). Self-reported psychological stress among international business travellers reported health concerns, heavy workloads when they returned (Fisher & Stoneman, 1998; DeFrank et al, 2000) and the lack of time off work after travel (Striker et al, 1999) as key factors in their psychological stress. Work-related travel becomes particularly stressful when it comes into conflict with family life and family obligations (Espino et al, 2002), including disruption of family plans and celebrations, causing conflict between the demands of work and the home. Business travellers’ time together is noticeably bracketed off from time apart, this distinctiveness makes their period

together more vulnerable and they may be more aware of spoiled time together as in commuter relationships (Jackson et al, 2000).

The work-family perspective

Studies on work and family show the implications of managing/combining multiple roles (work/family) and the impact of work-related stress on families (Perry-Jenkins et al, 2000). Others have shown that work and family systems are interconnected, such as the work/family border theory (Clark, 2000), which attempts to explain how individuals manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance (Clark, 2000). Current theories on work-family conflict and work-family enhancement indicate that the individual's emotions and attitudes from work often spillover to family life (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone, 2002). These mood spillovers may affect the interactions of individuals with their family, in terms of negative spillover (work-family conflict) and positive spillover (work-family enhancement). Individuals often make daily transitions between the work and family systems, tailoring their focus, their goals and their interpersonal style to fit the unique demands of each. Combining these multiple roles may add to the stress upon not only the individual but also the microsystem that is the family. Whilst there is a whole literature on teleworkers (see for instance Baruch, 2001) and flexible working, no research has specifically put the work-family interface for business travellers under the microscope.

Rationale for the current study

This study, considered the experiences of business travellers from a psychological perspective as loosely framed in the work-life balance literature, through idiographic

research (Banister et al, 1994) to understand how the business travellers encountered, engaged with and lived through situations (Elliott et al, 1999). Our broad topic concerned how individuals deal with business travel demands in their personal relationships, and how they might develop skills or coping strategies for dealing with the associated life style (Cassidy, 1992). More specifically, we were interested to learn how experiences of time together may differ from time apart. To this extent we examined business travellers who were in a long-term relationship, with children and who contributed the most financially in the family. This research may assist us to illuminate the transitions and processes that business travellers and their family go through, especially those who are experiencing difficulties with work-family conflict (Bruck et al, 2002), the impact of business travel on their well-being (Grzywacz & Bass 2003) or marital difficulties by helping them deal with psychological stress in more effective ways. Studies have shown that the impact of business travel may manifest itself in psychological difficulties such as depression and anxiety (Hubinger et al, 1999) and poor physical health (Frone et al 1997).

Methodology

Participants

Our inclusion criterion for the study was that participants engaged in irregular business travel as part of their employment involving at least five overnight stays away from their family in a one-month period to understand common perspectives and experiences among a group of relatively homogeneous individuals. Recruitment was through word-

of-mouth and snowballing. We interviewed eleven participants who met the criteria (8 males and 3 female). Participants were married (9) or living with their partner (2) and all had children. Seven participants were employees and four were self-employed. The spouses of the business traveller were either employed part-time (1), in full-time employment (7) or full-time homemakers involved in bringing up the children (3). The participants had been engaged in irregular business travel for an average of 20 years.

Interviews

We took a semi-structured interview approach using broad, exploratory and open-ended questions, including prompts that facilitated further discussion and elaboration of the topic under discussion, working directly and collaboratively with the respective participants (Banister, et al, 1994). Our prior formulated interview schedule was a guide only, giving the participants leeway in how to reply and was informed by the guidelines for qualitative interviews outlined by Smith and Eatough (2007). We addressed the participants' lifestyle and their time together with their family and time apart, through asking the participants to share their experiences of business travel and how the travel fits into their work and family life. For instance, participants were asked about the aspects of the lifestyle they enjoyed / found difficult and prompted to describe their experience when they were away from their family and when they returned. Finally, participants were asked about potential coping strategies that they used, together with possible advice they would give to others in a similar situation for making this lifestyle work. The final questions widened the focus to exploring the participants' more general experiences of business travel.

The principal researcher carried out the interviews in the participants' homes or place of business; each lasting between 60 to 90 minutes.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and potentially identifying information such as names, countries visited and organisation names were removed or altered and the participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Time was permitted after each interview for collecting demographic data, debriefing and questions.

Analysis

The method of analysis chosen for this study was thematic analysis, which is noted for its flexibility (King, 2004), in a broadly critical realist framework (Willig, 1999) in order to identify, analyse and report common themes within the data. As current research on business travellers' experience is very limited, thematic analysis was used in an inductive way, meaning that the themes are data-driven and strongly linked to the transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998). To do this we employed a six-phase approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006), which involved: familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes, defining and naming themes; before producing the research article. The themes were re-constructed and reviewed in collaboration with the second researcher, noting relevant connections and contradictions and discarding themes with weak evidence base or little relevance to the research question. The resulting themes were then categorised and organised to allow a coherent story of the participants' experiences.

We use extensive direct quotes, to present the results demonstrating that these are rooted in actual data and directly linked to the words of the participants (Whittemore, 2001; Yardley, 2000). The researchers' active role in identifying, selecting and reporting the themes is acknowledged as inevitable to the process of this study. We conducted respondent validation as we asked two participants for feedback on both the preliminary list of themes and interpretations as a reliability check.

Results¹¹

Four themes were identified from the data and are illustrated in the thematic map as shown in Figure.1.

Note to editor: insert Figure 1 about here

The first theme (accepting their lifestyle choice and role) centred on the participants' perceived role within their family and business/company. The theme highlights the process of accepting their multiple responsibilities and roles and how they justify their lifestyle choice. Indeed, business travel was seen as a necessary part of their work and the theme relates to how the participants found a balance between their commitment to their business/company and their family. It includes how participants made the most of

¹ In presenting the results, quotations have been used to illustrate the points and have been chosen for this purpose. Brackets have been used to indicate changes or omissions made for the purpose of anonymity and clarification. Care has been taken not to change the meaning of the participants' accounts.

their time when away on a business trip. The second theme (process of negotiation) refers to the additional negotiation that business travellers are required to engage in with family members, friends and employers. It also outlines how business travellers negotiate their re-entry into the family after time away. The third theme (needing to adapt and adjust) includes additional pre-flight 'obligations' that business travellers undertake, the additional psychological stress that they experience when away and highlights the process of adjusting and adapting to their roles and lifestyle choice. The process of learning is a key factor in successful adaptation to their multiple roles. The fourth and final theme (business travellers valued quality of time) relates to the behavioural aspect of the research questions and outlines the compensatory behaviours business travellers undertake in order to reduce the impact of their absence from their family. It also includes participants' personalised styles of coping they adopted in order to reduce the impact of their business travel on their family and themselves.

Accepting their lifestyle choice and role

All participants had chosen a career or work that involved business travel and business travel was seen as a necessary part of their role within the company/business. They spoke of a 'love of their job', their enthusiasm about 'career prospects', 'chosen career path' or the flexibility that came with being self-employed. Over time, they accepted that they had chosen this lifestyle and engaged in a process of 'defending' their choice and outlining their motivation for taking on a business travel role. This seemed to help participants begin to define themselves in terms of the multiple roles so that they could begin to deal with the psychological stress associated with business travel. Participants justified their reasons for their lifestyle choice in a variety of ways. Firstly, they

mentioned their choice of 'area' and 'location' akin to providing a 'better environment' for their family. Secondly, participants highlighted the financial benefits and rewards of their work and thirdly, they outlined their flexible working practice (such as working from home on occasion) that enabled them to spend more quality time with their family. They used compensatory statements to highlight the 'paybacks' and all participants believed that the perceived sacrifices involved, such as being away from their family and the psychological stress associated with business travel, were 'worth it'.

All participants highlighted the additional psychological and emotional stress associated with business travel. They were aware of the additional volume and intensity of work that continued despite them being away and the pressure of keeping on top of the work that continued to be generated. Although the participants tended to accept the 'reality' of business travel, these additional stressors had the potential of impacting upon their psychological and physical health. Brian illustrates the additional volume and intensity of work when away.

(There are) still questions that need to be resolved so you end up doing whatever you're doing during the day and the evening time you are actually catching up. Most of the time you end up getting up early in the morning before you leave the hotel room and you catch up, especially if you look at America. When you get up in the morning it's already half way through the UK day, so you have to get up earlier in the morning to catch up on the mails that half a day's already gone by because you can't do that during the day it's most definitely 50% more work during a travelling week than it would be normally.

Furthermore, there was a universal acceptance that business travel entailed working longer hours whilst away in order to cope with the volume of the work. This was further illustrated by participant's account of work that needs to be done whilst away, such as meeting tight deadlines and busy schedules. Derek stated:

It's really meetings and conferences and you'd have (targets) at the start of the week that you'd try to achieve and if you hadn't achieved it you'd work longer.

Despite the pressure to 'get the job done' whilst away, all participants made the most of their time when away on business trips and spoke about preferring to work longer and harder when away from their family to minimise their workload on their return. When away on a business trip, seven participants spoke of a mindset of being in a work mode, aware of needing to follow the work schedules of colleagues and the added pressure of achieving what they needed to on their business trips. They attempted to make the travel worthwhile, whether it was to be as productive as possible or even combining trips so that they are away from their family a minimal amount of time as illustrated by Brian:

There's no point trying to travel where your mind is back at home still anyway. You have to make sure that if you are travelling you make that travel worthwhile, otherwise why do it, why leave your family, have a guilt trip and then not be productive when you're away. So when I travel I am committed to what I am doing and then obviously in between I make time to ring my family, my wife and see how things are and all of that but when I am there I am focused because I have to travel I make sure I make it productive so that I don't feel guilt about the time that I've spent on that side... It's just (keeping) on top of things. So you minimise the amount of catch up you need to do. I'm

away from (family) anyway so why not take that time to do the work when I am away from them and minimise the amount later on.

Brian suggests that when away on a business trip, it is important to be focused on the task at hand. Although this clearly added to the stress and pressure, the process of accepting what their business travel would entail was one of the ways participants could then begin to find a balance between the commitment needed for work and the family. Those that were International business travellers were also affected by time zones, different cultures and jetlag, which seemed to add to their psychological stress. Edith describes her experience of being away on a business trip.

You work longer, much longer because you haven't got the distraction of having to go home and if you are at work in the day, you absolutely pack the day in and if you're there for two days you end up being there as late as possible before going to a hotel. You haven't got to cook a meal or think about it. You've literally got to walk into a hotel, walk up to a bar, your food and drink; you haven't got to do anything. There's no putting the washing machine on. There's no thought literally. I can think of a couple of times going to the gym to switch off and then you go to bed and get up the following day. You do work much longer hours than when you are at home especially in the States.

Edith highlights a traditional gender role of finding time to carry out household chores. Her perspective shows that for her, business travel focuses her into a work-mode with fewer distractions than she may experience if working from home and she enjoyed not having the 'mundane' tasks to distract her from her 'goals'. Whilst she acknowledges the opportunity and the need to 'catch up' and work longer, quite like Brian, there is

also a sense of freedom and liberation palpable in this quote, which is quite unlike some of the male participant's experience. For those participants who were self-employed, they placed great importance of working longer and harder as it was mainly to secure contacts and business contracts, thus directly affecting their business leads and profits.

This use of time when away illustrates how business travellers immerse themselves in work, which then necessitates time afterwards to recover from their travels. Recovery time is then negotiated with family, friends, and employers. In order to meet the needs of their business commitments as well as the needs of their family, all participants found that they were constantly negotiating and re-negotiating with family, friends and employers.

Process of negotiation

All participants felt that they needed to negotiate with family, friends and their employers to find an acceptable work/family balance and to fit the demands of work and family around what they needed to do. The areas that seemed to require the most negotiation were their children, such as childcare arrangements and domestic responsibilities. The irregularity of their business trips necessitated having regular conversations with their spouse/partner about childcare and domestic arrangement. This process of negotiating entailed negotiating their role within the family to best suit their model of marriage and their personal circumstances. It was noted that the participants' model of marriage often required the spouse to be available to cover childcare or to arrange for the necessary support networks. Most participants had a spouse who covered

the childcare arrangements as a default and the business traveller became the backup if they were able to accommodate, depending on the frequency and duration of their business trips. There was also a minimal level of support network needed. Participants felt that they had become reliant on friends, extended family members, formal childcare and neighbours. The support networks of people were often relied upon especially when travel plans changed or short notice was given for a business trip. This caused additional pressure on both parents and had the potential to become a cause of tension in the relationship.

Especially when children were younger, but even when they were older, the spouses' lives tended to focus on the children's activities. Managing the children's schedules was seen as a combined responsibility and one that was negotiated between both parents in order to lessen the impact of the business travellers' schedule on the family. Brian's account illustrates this point:

I think it's absolutely key to communicate with your partner and make sure that they're aware of why and what the travelling entails - that when you are away the responsibility isn't dropped. I think there's almost like a minimum network that you need to cover the eventuality when you are travelling and if you don't have that the stress level on the person that's travelling and the one's who are left behind would be significantly higher. I think that could potentially cause a lot of problems.

In contrast to Brian's account, three participants were not necessarily concerned about the added pressure and responsibility left to their spouses. They felt that their spouses'

were 'independent', 'capable' and 'got on with it'. Interestingly, two were female and the other participant had limited input into his children's daily routine.

All participants described taking care of home and family issues before and after a business trip. One participant described this as his 'responsibility' and felt unable to leave it to his spouse. Business travellers made an effort to leave not only their work in good order pre-trip but also take care of home and family issues. In particular, the male participants paid extra attention to practical matters such as gardening, paying bills before going away, commenting that if something needed to be done before going away they felt a sense of responsibility to complete the task. The female participants did not feel that they needed to 'make up meals' or carry out any additional tasks pre- trip, however, all participants spoke of activities that were aimed at compensating for their absence, including spending quality time with spouse and children, arranging childcare arrangements, though they viewed these activities as part of their home responsibilities.

Further negotiation occurred between the spouse and their employers, if they worked. The spouse/partner needed to negotiate their hours of employment to be able to provide the required childcare cover. Participants recognised that the family's support and support networks directly depended on the business traveller's job, thus assuring it priority. One participant commented on the dilemma of who remains behind if a child is ill, which was a source of conflict:

If (child) is ill and I had to travel, then should I not go? If one of us needs to be at home I can see the conflict in (wife's) eyes. My job is no more important than her job but who sacrifices? Think about the implications, my employer - how it's going to be seen there,

the impact of me taking (a day off) as opposed to (wife). So the conflict was there. That was a problem, I could see generally the more serious impact was me not going to work but (wife) resented that I think (Colin).

Colin's wife was in full-time employment and his account was similar to participants whose spouse worked. These participants felt that their income was an important factor in maintaining financial security and their standard of living, thus justified it as taking priority over their spouse's work commitments. Edith spoke of changing her travel plans due to family commitments and commented that she was able to do this because her employer was 'sympathetic' and 'flexible' when it came to family commitments.

If my child was sick I could change it. I mean I once arrived in (Europe) at 9:15 only to have a phone call from my children. I had sent them to school on an (inset day) and I had to fly back again. (Husband) was away and I had one child at a bus stop and one child going 'I can't believe you sent me to school' and so I got them home. It happens. There have been occasions when I've had to change it but they are few and far between.

Edith's accounts highlights the intense work pressure and mindset that led to her 'forgetting' that her children had a school inset day. This additional juggling, organising and negotiation makes it harder to plan for eventualities that arise. The context of this quote highlights that Edith felt able to make use of the flexibility provided by her employer to reschedule the meeting. Indeed, this flexibility was instrumental for her being able to negotiate her return as well as her decision to return, rather than her husband.

Participants all seemed to become work-focused pre-trip and often worried about work during 'family time'. The flexibility outlined by Edith was also an important factor in accommodating the interface between work and family and thus required negotiation. The self-employed participants seemed to have more flexibility and could tailor their travel around their family more. The employed participants did express the importance of flexibility within their company, although they reflected on how it might be seen by management.

When returning home from business trips, there was often a spillover of emotions and participants were aware of their attitude when returning home. All participants believed that they were 'not good company', could be 'cranky' and were often left 'drained' and 'tired' from their travels. Of particular interest were those participants who engaged in international business travel (seven in total) as the effects of their travel resulted in needing to sleep after their return. This was seen as essential and often interfered with family plans, especially if they returned early morning or shortly after their children were back from school. There was a need to negotiate the best way for them to integrate back into family life, taking the required steps to be available to their family whilst regaining their strength for work. Frank takes a very similar line when talking about the spillover of emotions:

When things were stressful at work then it becomes fairly stressful at home. I can be a bit stressed out with the kids. They are getting a bit older now so they are a bit more controllable. They understand generally about my home office and when I'm working. They will come in quietly and say hello rather than come in bounding to find me on the phone with a customer. There have been times in the past when I have been away a

couple of nights, get home late, I'm completely knackered, I've got a suitcase, briefcase, something else it's pouring with rain, I can't find a parking space. Trudging, walk in and they are all sitting watching the TV, and 'oh hi' and after I've dumped my stuff they are still there watching the TV. So I've been away slogging my guts out and no one even comes to say hello. And, so my (wife) and I have talked about that and she said 'sorry, I've been busy in my world' and you forget about the other person.

Frank's account suggests that when he returns from business travel and being away overnight, he expects his family to acknowledge his return into family life again. In view of his own tiredness and stress from the business trip he admits that he 'forgets' about the lives of his family that has continued in his absence. He would prefer to be acknowledged, valued and welcomed back into the family system in a way that considers the sacrifices he had made for the family. Participants felt that they needed to 'cope', 'adjust', 'evolve' and 'get used to' integrating work and family life, which all suggest a process that seemed to develop over a period of time. For participants who had the flexibility of working from home, there were no clear boundaries between their work and family commitments. Home working highlighted the adjustments made by both worker and family. Eight participants also talked about working late into the evenings when at home and this inevitably affected their relationships as the work was carried out during 'family time' leaving the spouse to continue with the childcare despite the business traveller's return.

Business travel was a norm within the participants' families and families tended to adapt and adjust around the business travellers' schedule and work. Although all participants believed that their families did adjust and adapt to this lifestyle, they also

described the psychological and emotional stress, which necessitated the process of adaptation as a way of responding to stressors.

Needing to adapt and adjust

All participants felt that they and their families needed to adapt and adjust to their chosen lifestyle. Firstly, the participants' account showed how their families went through a process of adapting and adjusted and secondly, they described their own unique learning process that helped to reduce their psychological and pre-trip stress when engaged in business travel.

Participants believed that their children had grown up with them travelling for business and thus did not know any different. Their absence became a norm within their family system. When speaking about the impact of business travel on their children, Colin stated: 'it's what they've always known'. This was similar across all participants where they reported that business travel was a part of their work commitments and perceived as such by their children:

My kids have always adapted because they've grown up with me going away. I'd say that the kids just accept that I go away. There's never been any kind of time when I feel as though the kids say 'oh why do you have to go away, why can't you be here all week?' because I think they just accept that that's just what I do (Allan).

The participants' belief that their families, especially their children, accepted that business travel is part of their work commitment may help participants feel that the

impact of their absence is less than it actually is. This may then help participants reduce their feelings of guilt when away.

Participants felt that 'life went on' and that when they returned after being away for several nights, the family adapted to their presence again. This seemed to be more evident when the periods of absence were longer and the spouse continued the parental role within the family, such as discipline, organising the children's schedules, and basically maintaining the household chores and tasks. Gemma went on to describe:

It's always very nice coming home and they are always happy for me to be home and sometimes if I'm a bit tired I can get a bit grumpy, but I go off to have a shower or a bath. We just carry on. Life just carries on. We have cuddles and hugs. When they were younger read them stories. There were times when I wasn't there I couldn't read them a story every night but when I was home I did and (husband) did if I wasn't home. They did get that but I think the other thing is knowing that (children) have been brought up by both parents. We've both been very active in working and bringing them up. It's not been one parent or another. It's been both of us.

Gemma describes that although 'life goes on' she does engage in compensatory behaviours to reduce the impact of her absence. She also highlights the sense of working together, negotiating and adopting to role that may not be traditional, for example household chores and raising children. The roles and responsibilities tended to be shared, where both played an active role in working and raising the children.

Furthermore, participants themselves went through a process of adapting to their role, which seemed to highlight their own unique process of learning. They described needing to be 'planned', 'methodical', 'productive' and 'efficient' when it came to their business trips. It was evident that the irregular nature of their business travel required additional planning and organising, from an individual and family perspective.

Participants' travel arrangements tended to evolve into a well-ordered, task-orientated operation and they often tried innovative ways to change, adapt and adjust. Successful adaptation to living this lifestyle seemed to require a process of learning. Participants all spoke about how this was done by emphasising the 'mistakes' they had made, making the necessary corrections along the way and eventually finding the right method that best suited them and their family, from travel arrangements to packing their suitcase.

Derek offers:

There is no question that in the beginning you are still trying to find the right method and that's a much more stressful thing. If things don't go according to plan, like flight delays so I have now (changed routes).

Derek suggests that this process of adapting to the role leads to added pressure and stress in the beginning but once a planned routine is in place the level of stress reduces. All the other participants reiterated this by describing their individualised method and as Irene viewed it: 'I've got it ideal now'. Derek commented that he had 'got it down to a fine art'.

Participants also adjusted to the role of being a business traveller and their role as parent, often switching back into their parental role as soon as they returned from their business trips. Edith elaborated on returning from a business trip:

You just switch back in to being a parent. You drop your bags, you might pick them up from school and they're thrilled to see you and for 2 hours you listen to everything they've done from it was her fault, his fault to I scraped my knee on this - everything. You become mum and then you unpack and then yeh, it's always good coming home, always. When you drop your cases at the door, you have to switch into being the parent, whether you are male or female. Children don't allow you that time to unpack and talk about your trip because let's face it they aren't interested.

This account was similar to other participants in that it shows how they felt an obligation to listen to what the family had done whilst they were away, thus 'fitting into' family life again. One participant spoke of feeling 'out of the loop' when she returned home and needing to re-adapt to her role as parent:

Sometimes I feel guilty if I don't know the detail of what's happened at school or at the club because I wasn't there so I didn't know the detail. You can hear the other mums they all know. You feel a bit guilty as a parent. I'm not up to speed but I have spent time thinking I wasn't a good mum and I tried to overcompensate I think by doing stuff at the weekend (Gemma).

Indeed, upon returning to the office nine participants spoke of needing to catch up on e-mails and queries that arose when they were away, however, they felt that they were

never truly away from 'work' with the technology available, such as smart-phones and Wi-Fi. Of particular importance was to make time available to carry out these tasks, however, this time often fed into 'family time', especially if the participants were self-employed or were able to work from home. Participants spoke of blurred boundaries between work and family, as illustrated by Gemma, who is self-employed:

I am often thinking about the work I need to do. I need to do some work today and because you are working in the house there is a constant reminder. If I work hellishly long hours now it's for my business, for me and it's a choice rather than you have to do it.

The above two quotes illustrates how Gemma felt about her lifestyle choice and this was of particular importance to her. Despite her feelings of guilt about not being 'a good mum' and her blurred boundaries, she was able to justify this as her 'choice'.

Similar accounts from other participants were noted especially when it came to making an effort to spend time with family. All participants spoke of quality of time, meaning that the time they have together is better used and more appreciated.

Business travellers valued quality of time

All participants attributed great importance of the quality of time they spend with their family. As they experienced a variety of disruptions of family plans and celebrations, they believed that they needed to 'make up' for their periods of absence. All felt that they made the most of the time they had when together and wanted to spend time with

their family. They tended to ensure that they bathed, read stories or were the one to tuck the children into bed when they were home to compensate for the times when they were away. On their return, participants spoke of quality family time and often tried to 'pack days full of activities'. They also made an extra effort to be with the family and engage in family activities, often before taking time for themselves. This may have also been to compensate for their own feelings of guilt about leaving childcare arrangements to the spouse, the perceived added burden on the spouse and missing family occasions. Brian describes making a (un)conscious and concerted effort to arrange time with his family:

We definitely make an effort to get time together. If I've been away from a week, the following week, I'm a lot more conscious of the time I finish in the afternoon or the evening and what time I get home or when I'm working from home. Similarly I 'd be saying to (wife) 'you're not working late tonight are you?' So for that first week, it's not really a conscious thing that's the bizarre thing but it's, because I missed her I would then make sure that for that next week, I suppose as a coping mechanism to make up for the time lost.

All participants maintained contact with their family whilst away, via telephone, e-mail or Skype. They were aware of thinking about their family whilst away, often purchasing material gifts to bring back from the countries visited. These gifts became an expected treat and something that both the children and business traveller appreciated. It seemed to be a way of heightening the excitement of their return and a way back into their parental routine and responsibility.

I've always bought them a treat. They looked forward to a treat, little jellybeans from America or a chocolate or a teddy or a t-shirt or something. I think they used to quite enjoy that and I'd try and get them a treat when I'd been away (Gemma).

It's all blackmail, it's kind of mum's going away for the week we get a treat at the end and we get presents, so that's kind of what you do. Probably most business travellers would probably do the same (Edith).

One participant, Frank, suggested that 'the longer the trip, the bigger the present' (). These quotes suggest that business travellers realise that their business travel has an impact on their family and this compensatory behaviour was one of the ways that they could 'make up' for their time apart. Gemma overcompensated and her account was similar to other participants who spoke of the (un)conscious effort that they made:

I don't think I always have coped. I've probably overcompensated, so I feel like I'm not a terrible parent. I always make quite an effort for birthdays or treats, weekends or activities I think. I try and think outside the box for what to do or where to go and just try and do things with them and stuff so I suppose that's a coping mechanism, a way of feeling you continue to be a good parent. I suppose because of working you can afford to do things a bit like paying for extra activities for (children). If we didn't work we couldn't afford that sort of thing so I suppose goes some way of justifying some of that side of it. The fact that we live somewhere nice, we couldn't afford anything like this if we lived somewhere else.

Another way participants 'justify' their lifestyle choice was to outline the positive aspects of their work. There was also a process of finding a balance between 'making time' to be with their family and needing time for themselves to recover from their work schedules. Participants spoke of also needing 'alone' time and time where they could 'recharge their batteries'.

All participants felt that business travel was tiring, often leaving them physically and mentally drained. In order to overcome this, they spoke about needing space to 'release' and 'relax'. They had an awareness of their individual and personal style of coping with the effects of business travel. It was particularly important for participants to have an individual outlet that did not involve the family and to have personal time to 'relax' and 'wind down' from their travels. There was a general consensus (10 participants) that business travellers need an outlet of some sort. Participants referred to a variety of physical exercise activities such as sport (individual or team), attending the gym, swimming and running:

I think everyone needs an outlet. Whether it's a hobby, sport whatever. If you've got that on the weekends, evening times when you get to totally detach from your work and get sort of away time I think that helps as well. But the best thing was taking the time off to recharge the batteries. That's something that I still continue to do (Frank).

Brian also illustrates the importance of taking time to recover from travel and highlights the potential negative impact if this is not done:

Travel is tiring and over a period of time you actually get incredibly fatigued and I think you need to take the down time. You have to make sure you get rest so if that means that you have to plan your holiday time more evenly throughout the year to give you that down time. When I was travelling extensively I actually take a week (at a time), throughout the year because I need that down time just to recover from the travelling and to relax a bit. If I had waited for a few months I'd have got to breaking point probably because your body never has a time, especially with jetlag, jetlag is a killer. I'd run myself into the ground very quickly and that could easily affect your work and your relationship as well, very easily because you just become irritable, you get too tired, you're not able to focus as much. I realised pretty quickly when I was travelling that you can't keep going at that pace (Brian).

Brian presents the possible impact of business travel on both the traveller and their relationships. This seemed to be important for other participants who spoke of a transition period between work and family domain. They often used their time on the aircraft, train or car as a way of making the transition from employee to parent/spouse. This time seemed instrumental in balancing work and family life and their perceived role within each. Participants knew that when they returned they would need to make that transition seamless and were prepared to immediately engage in family conversation. Indeed, some participants acknowledged that this was not always possible and greatly depended on their attitude when returning home.

Discussion

This research relayed participants' accounts of integrating work and family whilst business travelling. The themes offer insight into the practicality, negotiation and psychological experiences of business travellers (Figure 1), which are marked by choice, acceptance, adapting and negotiation. An important finding of this study, and one that has not been previously researched, was how the participants coped with their lifestyle choice. The main coping strategies employed were adaptability, flexibility, negotiating with their significant others and compromising for instance when spending quality of time with their family. The study not only explored how home-work life is negotiated but demonstrates the importance of these home-work negotiations in enabling mobile lives to happen.

Business travel is different when compared to commuter relationships and occupations that demand long periods of absence, as it is irregular in nature and thus has unique challenges and benefits. One such difference is that of weekly regrouping. Commuter relationships, for example, attach symbolic meaning to their weekend reunions and take comfort in this regularity (Gerstel & Gross, 1982). Business travellers do not have the benefit of such routine and regularity and as such need additional and ongoing planning, negotiation and adaptation for both themselves and their family. The nature of irregular business travel also means that there is no clear dividing line between 'work-time', which is owned by the employer and 'leisure time', which is owned by the individuals (Holley et al, 2008).

These findings can be interpreted and framed within work/family border theory (Clark, 2000). This theory addresses how individuals construct, maintain, negotiate and border-cross and how they draw the lines of demarcation between work and family. It further

shows how domain integration and segmentation of domains, border creation and management, border-crossers behaviour and the relationships between border-crossers (at work and home) influence work-family balance. We suggest that business travellers 'border-cross' more often and have less clear boundaries between work and family, thus requiring more negotiation and adaptation. The additional juggling, negotiation, organising and re-entry into the family that needs to occur leads to a blurring of roles between work and family, far more in the case of business travellers.

One element of this theory involves the degree to which psychological or behavioural aspects of one role/domain enters another, for example, when business travellers are working from home, they have highly permeable borders because family members are accustomed to frequently entering and talking with the individual while at work. However, when business travellers are away they tend to be work-focused, working at an increased pace to achieve deadlines, goals and objectives. This requires working longer and harder and their time is taken up by work related tasks. Thus, during these times their borders are less permeable, which requires additional time to recover after each trip. Their spouse/partner also becomes the 'border-keeper' who is essentially influential in defining the domain and border, once again requiring additional negotiation in order to maintain a work-family balance. However, speaking of a work-family balance suggests a state of equilibrium between the domains of work and family that did not exist in our study (Holmes, 2004). Balancing work and family is a wider societal problem, but our findings mirror those of Hochschild (1997) in that they suggest that families see it as a private dilemma and devise strategies, individually or as a couple, to cope with the impact of business travel and psychological stress. This study shows that participants went through a process of making the lifestyle work for them as

individuals and as couples by individually tailoring their lives around their work commitments. They were able to do this by accepting what the business travel entailed, for example, the need to travel, the added psychological stress of pre-trip planning, flight delays, and etcetera. Individuals devised strategies to prepare for and cope with travel, such as jet lag (DeFrank, 2000; Fairechild, 1992) and in particular finding time for themselves by engaging in their chosen outlet. They also coped with feelings of guilt of being absent through compensating behaviours when they were home and when they were away. Participants (un)consciously made extra efforts to make their time together a priority, carrying out tasks related to their perceived responsibilities at home and working longer and harder when away in order to minimise their workload when they returned. The time lost travelling is rarely compensated for in terms of reduced workloads (Espino et al, 2002; Gustafson, 2006) and participants found employer flexibility, such as days off in lieu or working from home as an important factor in reducing their stress. These compensatory behaviours seemed to help participants face the unique demands and challenges of business travel.

These findings also suggest that based on their family dynamics, the relationship between family obligations and work-related travel tends to be a matter of individual adaptation to their multiple roles. Indeed, this seems to suggest that their family relationships evolved and adapted in order to meet the demands of work. In this study, the experiences of the spouse/partner were filtered through the participants' interpretations and thus future research on business travel would benefit from gaining a better understanding of the impact on the whole family, including children. A comparison study of male and female business travellers may further our understanding of gender roles within this group of individuals.

Our findings further build on research on integrating multiple roles in that business travellers need to 'juggle' their commitments, which affect their mood. In order to cope with the 'spillover' (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone, 2002) of emotions, participants devised specific strategies, such as having outlets or alone time that enabled them to recuperate from travel. All participants were aware of the impact of their emotions and moods on their family and were keen to keep this in check. They did this by making the transition from work-mode to family-mode as seamlessly as possible.

Indeed, the nature of doing business has become geographically dispersed (Beaverstock et al, 2009) and this view resonates with participants' accounts of their (inter)national travel. The current study also found that the importance of face-to-face discussions took priority over communication technology. Communication technology is not likely to replace face-to-face interactions and thus a key factor for participants was finding a balance between their work commitments and maintaining their familial relationships. Participants accepted their role within the company/business and that this came with a certain amount of responsibility. The acceptance of their lifestyle choice seemed to be highly linked to financial benefits and security that their career and lifestyle brought. Travel was seen as important for career opportunities and there was a strong relationship between income and travel, which were similar to the findings of Gustafson (2006). Lassen (2009) showed that employees have an obligation to travel in order to access, maintain and enhance their knowledge networks. Although participants described their 'reality' of business travel, they felt that they could 'live with' the need to travel for business given that they had chosen this lifestyle. They also placed great importance on providing their children with material resources to ensure their future

success and spoke of certain choices and decisions made, either individually or as a couple, to live a certain lifestyle and have a certain standard of living. Not all individuals will be able to find a comfortable work/life balance and it therefore seems important for future studies to research those relationships that broke down as a result of irregular periods of absences or individuals who were not prepared to negotiate and adapt to this lifestyle. Business travel may not suit all individuals and couples' model of marriage may not be strong enough to withstand the irregularity of absence, short-term planning and added spillover of emotions and mood.

Conclusion

Despite the relatively small number of business travellers' interviewed for this study, the findings tentatively highlight the psychological impact of business travel on individuals and their families. A process of continuous negotiation, coping with stress and personal strategies is needed to help them integrate work and family commitments. The implications of work stress and work-life imbalance is the additional pressure that business travellers are under to juggle multiple roles, creating the need to cope in order to prevent dissatisfaction and marital difficulties. Despite the varied and unique challenges business travellers face, they are finding ways of coping, adapting and adjusting. These are often very personal to the family and negotiated within the family system. One theoretical implication of this study is that it identifies the need for a more holistic approach, which acknowledges that work and family are not separate spheres but are very much interconnected. Employers also need to recognise that an individual needs change as they move through different phases of their lives, such as the age of their children, the status within the company, etcetera. Indeed, business travels value the

flexibility afforded to them by employers and this enables them to accept their choice to engage in business travel.

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