
The Future of Work

Some insights from the ESRC national
research programme

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The Future of Work

Background

- Basic premise: any study of the future of work should focus both on the workplace and on the role of work in wider social life.
- To detect possible emerging trends we should look at two new 'knowledge economy' occupations:
 - Call centres
 - Software developers

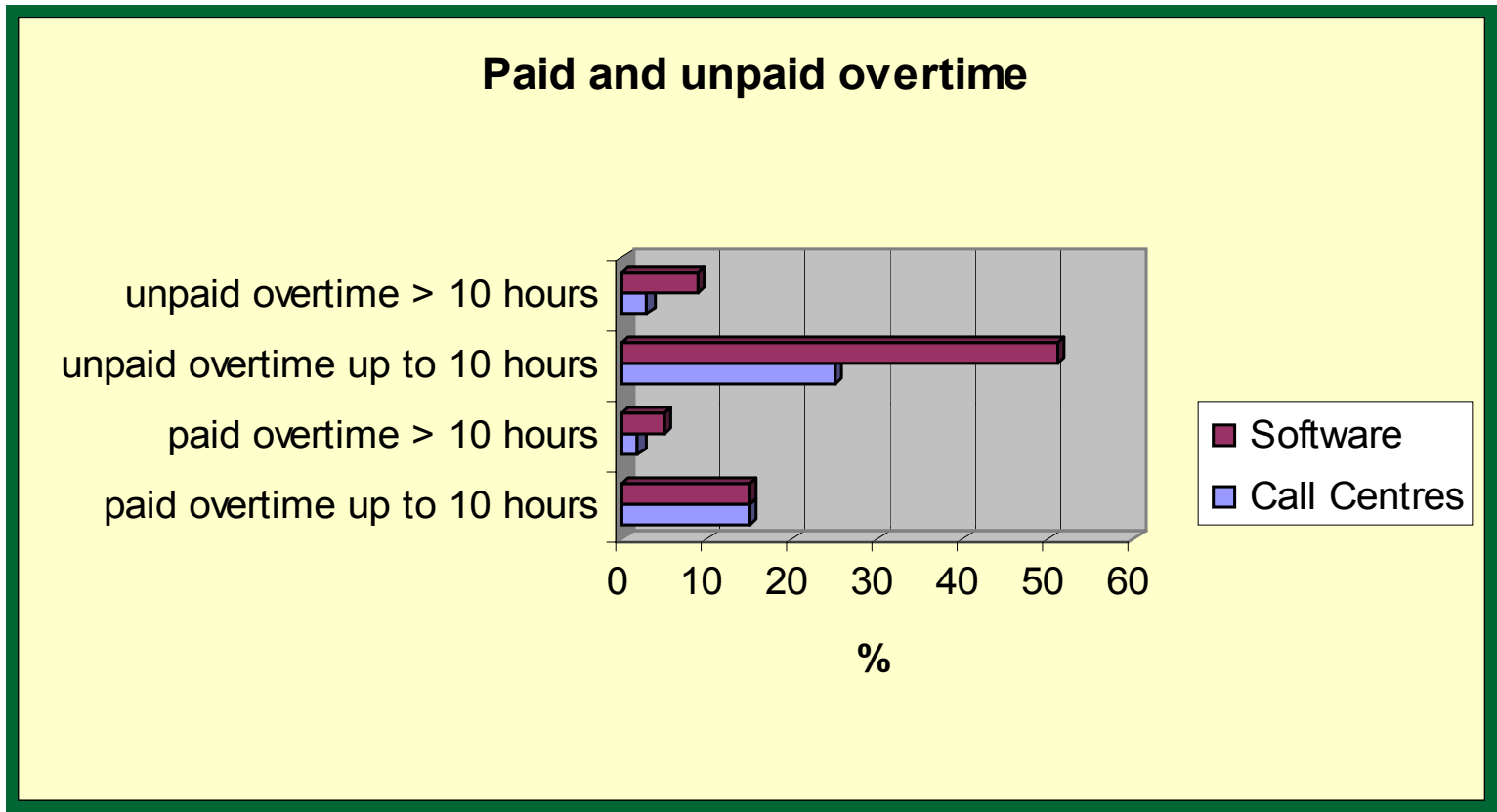


Workforce composition

- Full-time contracts: call centres 86%; software 93%
- Gender : call centres 70% female; software 72% male
- Age : call centres 59% < 30 years; software 38% < 30 years



Quantitative extensions of working life

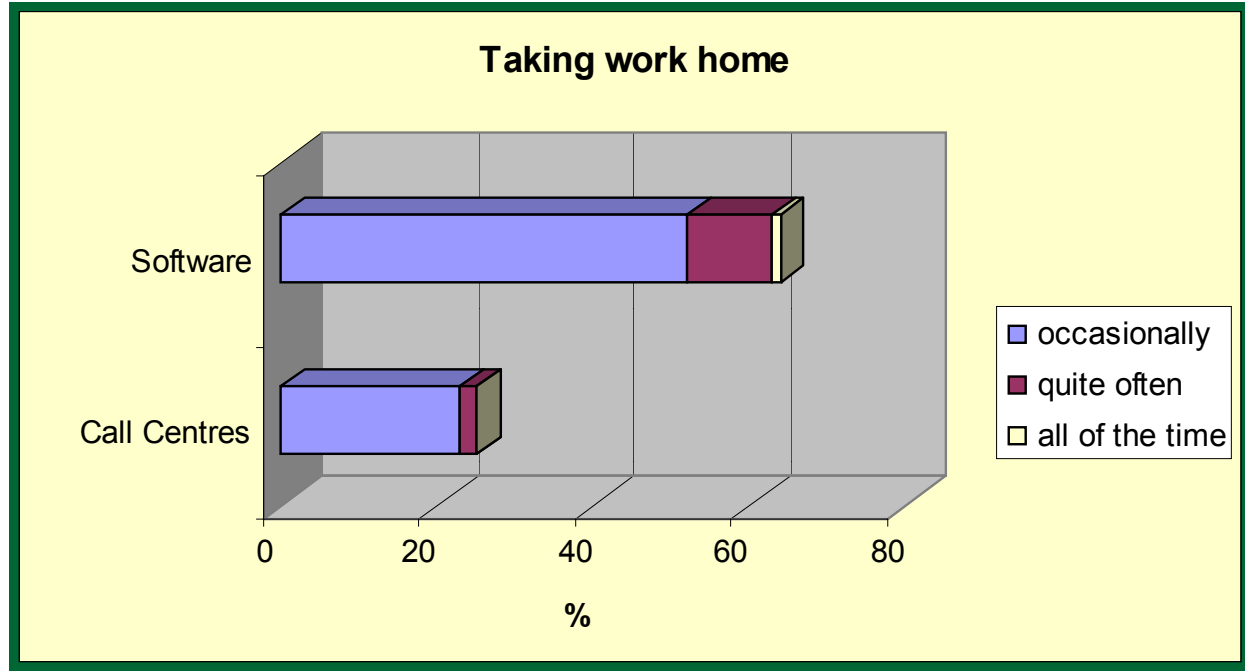


Work-life imbalance

- **Quantitative spillover** beyond contractual boundaries widely experienced through:
 - Shiftworking (in call centres)
 - Unpaid overtime (esp in software & call centre mgt)
 - Taking work home
 - Juggling shift patterns and household responsibilities
- **Qualitative spillover** experienced through:
 - Exhaustion, stress and other ill-health
 - Thinking about job after work
 - & affected by low control & high cognitive demands



Quantitative extensions to working life

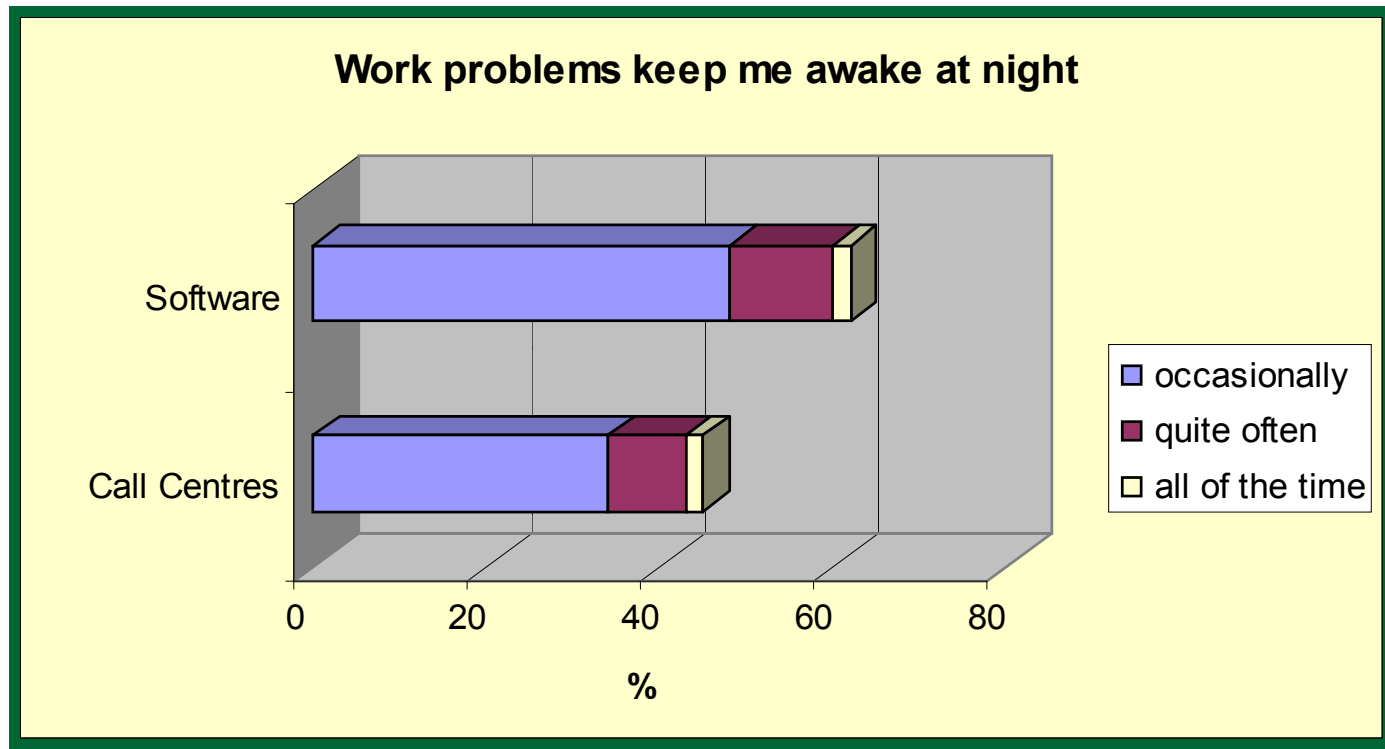


“You have got to take some work with us and do extra work at home ... so it doesn't bother me that much ... I don't feel resentful. I knew that when I took the job on. It's not a 9-5, you have got to take work home and finish it off the next day.”

(Call Centre: Team Leader)



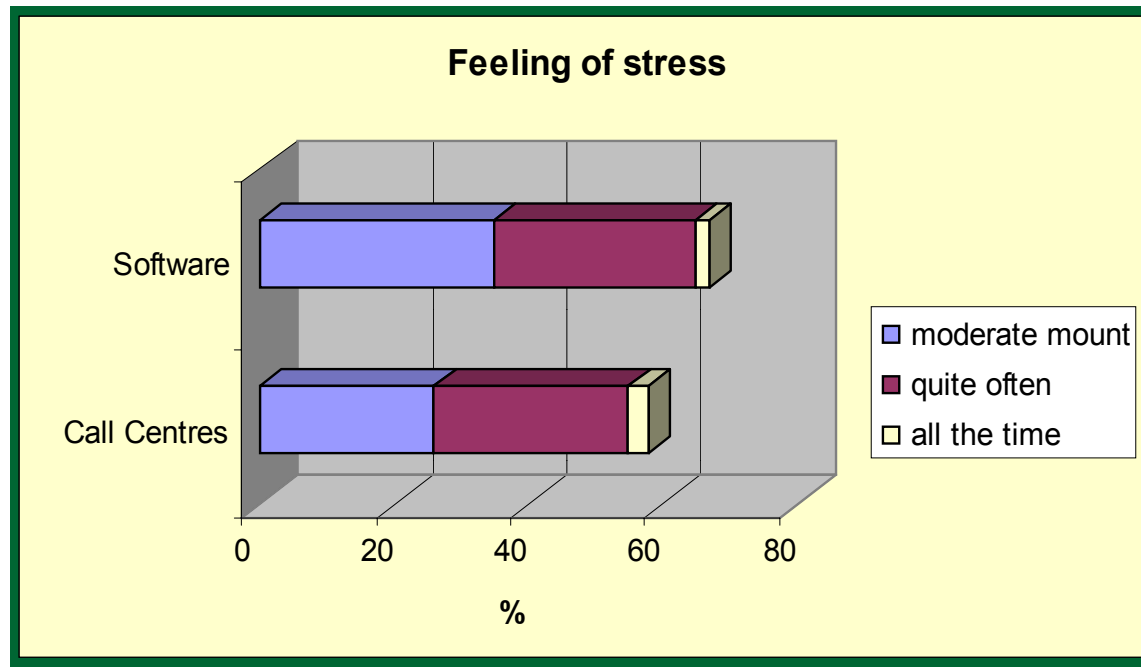
Qualitative extensions to working life



“I don’t wake in the middle of the night anymore; alcohol sees to that.”
(Software: Manager)



Qualitative extensions to working life

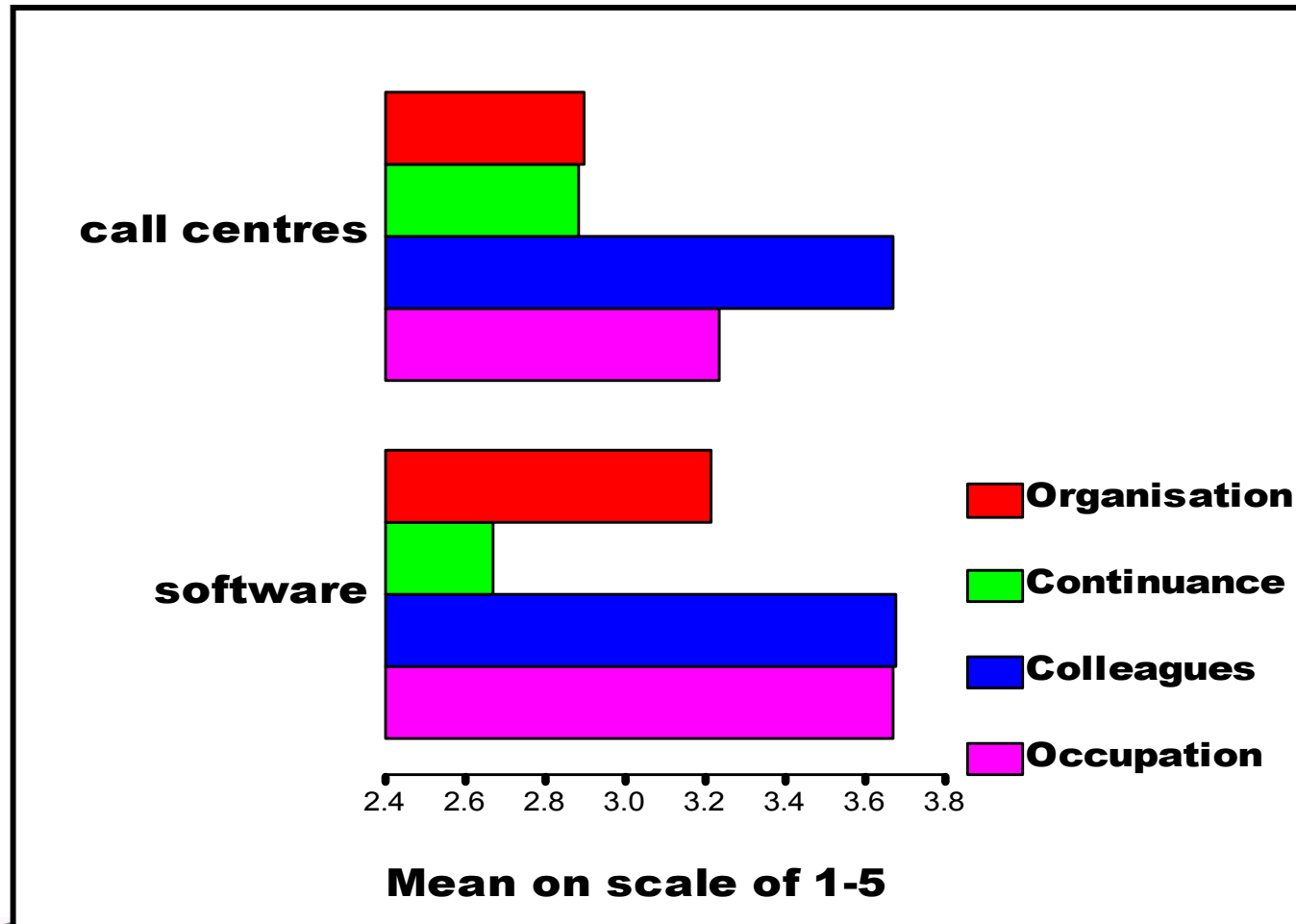


“I used to go home at night and didn’t want to speak for a couple of hours, you know. I had been talking all day on the phone, you know. If the phone went at home I didn’t want to answer the phone, you know, because you had been speaking all day.”

(Call Centre: Customer Advisor)



Pattern of commitment



How important is work?

- In both sectors, people work to live rather than live to work

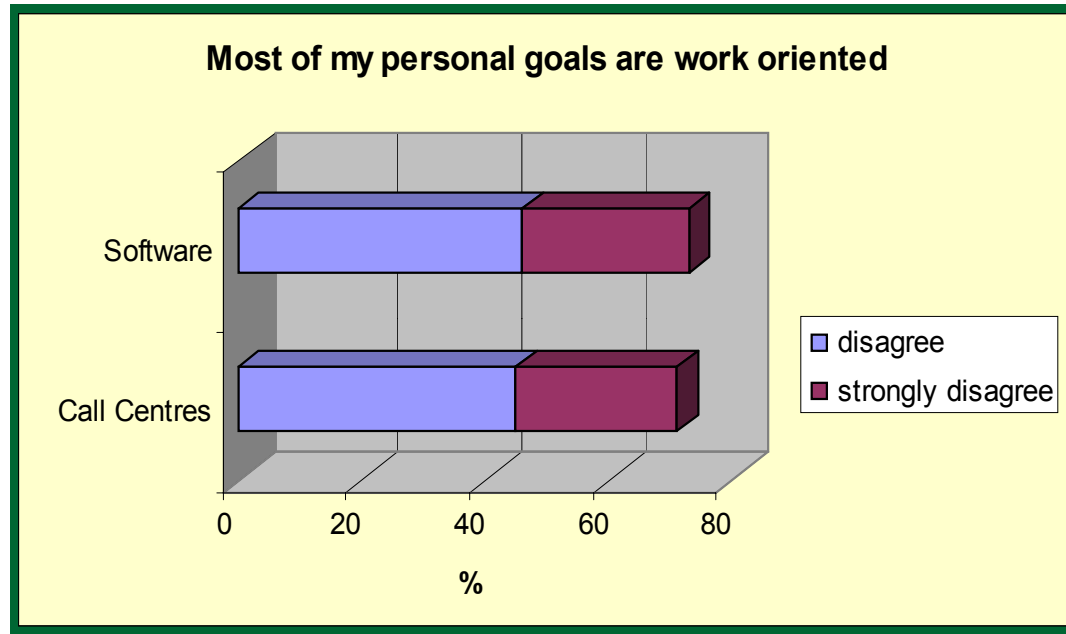
Scale of agreement 1-5

	CC	SD
Major life satisfactions from family	4.09	3.76*
Leisure matters more than work	3.55	3.40*
Work to afford good social life	2.87	2.78
No reason to work except money	2.69	2.57
Life goals connected to work	2.20	2.22
Work & life integrated	2.03	2.17*
	<i>N</i>	
	739	262

* *Sig. diff. between sectors*



Work centrality



This job is just a means of getting money. If I had a job I wanted to do I could see it as being more important, you know. Just now my main things are my boyfriend, my house, my family, my hobbies, my studying (OU), you know. The work probably comes underneath all of that.

(Call Centre: Customer Advisor)



Conclusions: developments

- In many ways the future of work resembles its past

BUT we can detect:

- Increased temporal flexibilities.
- Increased permeability of the work-life boundary.
- Instability in organisational structures ('churn')
- Monitoring and control of qualitative performance
- No collective forms of representation
- Increase in stress for all grades

