

Conceptualising Work, Family and Community: What's missing?

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Keynote address, International Industrial Relations Association Conference, Sydney, 23-27th August 2009

This stream of research is new to the IIRA agenda and its addition is an important innovation. It builds upon the work of recent years to increase the analysis of work and family issues as well as the now long standing effort to see a gendered perspective applied in the field of industrial relations.

The range and quality of papers in this stream attests to the importance of these issues to thinking about industrial relations now.

In this contribution I want to reflect on some theoretical perspectives in making sense of work, family and community, and how they fit together and to explore the ways in which the perspectives of industrial relations are critical to a thorough and informed analysis of these connected issues. Industrial relations scholars and our tools and insights can contribute to making better sense of these relationships and their empirical outcomes, and thus the policy and action that might improve them.

In these reflections, I draw on a body of empirical work that the Centre that I am associated with has been gathering over the past four years. In this light, this paper has three authors reflecting our joint work¹.

Locating our analysis of work in its larger context

The experience of work, its conditions and relations are always located in particular household and community contexts. For many of the peak years of industrial relations scholarship over the past fifty years, these have been essentially background to analysis – not irrelevant to many employment phenomena, but not the focus of analysis. It is at moments of significant economic and social change that work's location in particular household and community relations becomes obvious and of interest. One such moment was Polanyi's 'great transformation' (1944) where he analyses the embeddedness of market regimes in the larger social and political fabric, and the ways in which a counter social movement is called into being by the operation of 'free' markets. Such an 'embedded', connected approach to analysis is appropriate to the current transformation underway in many economies as they witness the growing reach of labour markets into social life, with important implications for not only economic production but also social re-production.

In pre-industrial Europe, there was much less separation of work from household life. While the division of labour was highly gendered, much work was conducted in and around the household, and community relations and their celebrations followed the seasonal contours of the agricultural year, with much greater spatial and temporal integration of work, family and community than we currently experience.

As work moved into factories in the industrial revolution, work separated from home and national 'labour markets' emerged – with all their perpetual restructuring, and human relocation and dislocation. At the same time, at least in middleclass households, 'breadwinner man' gradually achieved at least discursive dominance in many societies, partnered by 'domestic caring woman' (Williams 2000). While this post-WWII 'standard' was far from prevalent in many poor, non-white communities it took root in many households and – with more powerful effect – in the psyche and imaginary of the citizens of industrialised nations like Australia.

It is no surprise that the current profound changes in work arrangements in many countries are throwing the relationship between work, family and community into sharp relief – calling forward the kind of papers that this stream of industrial relations scholarship exhibits. Several factors are at play in 'industrialised' countries and beyond, and explain this essential line of intensified enquiry. These include:

1. the gradual displacement of breadwinner households;
2. the entry of women into paid work and the transformation of care regimes, including the redistribution of care to commodified exchanges (that fuel the growth of service sector employment)

and mean that an increasing proportion of the paid workforce have simultaneous care responsibilities while at their jobs;

3. the rapid transformation of employment with growth in service sector work replacing manufacturing;
4. the reshaping of the form of employment contracts, the fraying of labour regulation in some countries (like Germany and between 1996 and 2007, Australia) in the presence of sometimes weak enforcement (Appelbaum and Schmitt 2009);
5. the reshaping of working time (McCann et al 2007);
6. new technologies of work that are blurring the boundary around work (including the mobile phone, the personal computer, work from home and work while travelling);
7. the emergence of large new industrialising nations and the rapid transformation of their internal work, family and community regimes, often accompanied by mass internal and external migration;
8. the international character of 'work-care chains' as women migrate for work (often to undertake care work in rich countries) generating long chains of care back to their countries, communities and households of origin, affecting their own children and dependents (Parrenas 2001, Lister et al. 2007, Lutz 2008).

International prospects and perspectives

These rapid, radical changes in work, family and community settings are not confined to industrialised countries: by far the largest transformations are underway in India and China where industrialisation is underway on a scale that is much larger than any preceding industrial revolutions - and in a much shorter period.

In China, these changes are being accompanied by seismic internal migration flows which disturb and reshape household relations and their spatial organisation (Fan 2008). There are estimates that the number of migrant workers living in cities in China now number more than 200 million – exceeding the total number of migrants worldwide. Fan (2008) has analysed how China's internal system of citizenship and labour rights affects workers migrating from rural areas to the booming coastal industrial cities, and is reshaping household relations in both rural and urban locations. In India, industrialisation is proceeding apace against the background of a very large informal workforce, and institutional structures that are not inclusive of the majority of Indian women workers or their concerns (Hill 2009).

Work, family and community intersections in these contexts are ripe for research. While 'work, family and community' will have very different meanings in such settings – as they have in all countries – the categories of work, family and community are very relevant to analysis in both India and China - two countries that will cast long shadows over the remainder of the global economy in the current century.

Putting together work, family and community

A large body of empirical work now exists in relation to better understanding the relationships between work and family life. Much of that work has real strengths: it is multi-disciplinary in perspective, it applies multiple methods, there are some good cross-national studies and it draws attention to the role of the state and social norms, as well as employers, workers and family members.

Much of it is in agreement about some critical issues. There is considerable agreement, for example, about the workplace and household characteristics that shape work-life interaction in industrialised countries like the US, UK and Australia. Long hours, poor quality jobs, little control over working time and overload at work are strongly associated with poorer work-family outcomes in many settings. There is considerable agreement about the size and direction of effects: that both work-to-family and family-to-work spillover exist and that this spillover can be positive or negative. There is considerable agreement that negative work-to-family interaction is more common and more significant than negative family-to-work interaction. Studies discern two forms of work-family strain: general strain and time-based strain, and suggest that the former is often more significantly negative in its effects than time strain (Voydanoff 2008).

The body of existing research also tells us that the relationship between work and household life *matters*. There are costs to health, to workplace outcomes (absenteeism, turnover, workers

satisfaction/engagement) and to households in terms of strain on parents and on children (Duxbury and Higgins 2003).

We now know quite a bit about what makes a difference at work (and to a lesser extent in households and in individual behaviour) in improving outcomes in industrialised countries: for example, more employee control of working time arrangements, good leave systems, supportive supervision and quality care options all help.

A number of good summary volumes about this research, including some comparative studies now exist, including a few outside the industrialised world (see for example Heymann et al, 2004).

Research gaps in the field of work, family and community

However, while study of the intersection of work and family has been underway in a number of nations in the past twenty years, it has suffered from at least four limitations. Firstly, much of the existing work has been undertaken in the US, Canada, Europe and Australia. It is first-world-centric. Important work by scholars like Parrenas (2001) link up the first and third worlds and the work-care chains that connect them, but there is too little of such work. There is also too little work outside the industrialised first world, and especially about Asian nations, including India and China.

Secondly, the existing body of work over-researches the professional/managerial worker living in dual couple household with children. The situations of low income workers and their households and communities are much less studied, as are the situations of sole-parents/workers and those living in non-couple households or the burgeoning issue of care for the aged.

Thirdly, there has been much work on work-family interaction, but much less on how work, family and *community* intersect. There are some important exceptions (for example, some UK studies that are class conscious and spatially sophisticated (Perrons et al 2005, Jarvis 2005, McDowell 2004) and new work by a group at our Centre (see below)). Of late, more writers have been including the community in their analysis, recognising that workplaces and families are also shaped by the nature of communities in which they are located, and vice versa: community fabric is in turn increasingly shaped by the nature of work-family interaction.

Fourthly, there is relatively little reflection in the literature about the connection between evidence around work and family and how it affects (or fails to affect) policy. This is an important issue in such an applied field: many researchers are keen to see and contribute to building better arrangements for workers. When and how does research evidence have effect? What are the blockages to such effect?

Fifthly, the field is under-theorised and where theory is attempted it is often micro-level or considers only work and family and the nature of relations between these two spheres. It is therefore timely to reflect on the existing framework for our analysis and perhaps to reach beyond micro-level theory and aim for some guiding mid-level theory, and for thought about larger factors that shape outcomes of the interaction of work, families and community.

Theorising work, family and community: Can we reach for a framework?

Theory making is troublesome in the field of industrial relations. Many consider the field under-theorised (Kelly 1998), yet those who try to theorise know how dangerous this can be: we are cautious in our theory, but not in our robust critique of those who try to do it. Of course critical response is a primary tool in the labour process of academic work: wielded well, it improves our work. However, we have perhaps spent more intellectual energy tearing down modest theoretical offerings, rather than reflecting on what might be reasonable aspirations for theory in such a complex field of social science, and what might represent constructive improvements in theory. Of course politics and the values that scholars bring to such a politically contentious area of scholarship have also played their role in provoking the critique of theory.

Nonetheless, this difficult and sometimes hazardous struggle for clarity about concepts, and how concepts relate to each other in different circumstances, is worthy: it facilitates historical and international comparison, it informs the construction of systematic research, it helps make sense of complex empirical realities, and it clarifies policy issues and sites for action. To this end, we need better theorising of work, family and community life.

However, caution about theory making in the social sciences is appropriate: as social scientists we should not aspire to the ‘fruitless’ search for predictive theory and inviolable rules of the social world on a par with the rule-making and theorising of the ‘hard’ sciences (Flyvbjerg 2002: 166) – and certainly not to grand narratives. Instead, we should be unapologetic that we are humans studying humans (with the double opportunity for subjectivity), in particular historic and national contexts, and instead aspire to a social science that illuminates ‘where we are and where we want to be’, recognising that the delineation of key questions and their answers is saturated with values and needs to include analysis of social power in making meaning (Flyvbjerg 2002).

Therefore this contribution addresses whether we can usefully reach for helpful, modest ‘middle-level theory’ (Merton 1968): that is theory that defines, maps, analyses, and perhaps helps evaluate current policy and action and point to more fruitful directions.

Keeping theoretical and empirical work in conversation

Our discipline has a strong tradition of keeping empirical work in strong conversation with our conceptual effort. To this end, research at the Centre for Work + Life has been gathering data about how work, home and communities fit together and how they are shaped by the larger social context in Australia. In recent years we have pursued how work, home and community fit together in Australian suburbs, how they fit together for workers in the health system, how they construct the participation of low paid workers in vocational education and training, and how changing employment regulation affects outcomes.

Table 1: Empirical sources: Centre for Work + Life projects

Work, Life and Health Study (2006-2009)		Respondents
All occupational groups in state health system		
Three life-stages: · entering workforce · work into parenthood and other forms of care · work into pre-retirement and retirement	Rural and remote locations, high and low income workers/households	
Data sources		
Interviews and focus groups	All occupational groups, life stages, locations	104 respondents
Surveys	Representative national survey of 2700 workers (2008), 2700 (2009)	5400 respondents in representative annual national work-life surveys and a climate survey of the Western Australian health workforce
National data sets	ABS, HILDA: contextual data	
Work, Home and Community Study (2008-2010)	Locations	Respondents
4 low income outer suburban	Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne	
4 higher income outer suburban master planned communities	Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne	
2 inner urban harbourside communities	Sydney, Melbourne	
Data sources		
Interviews and focus groups	Teens, workers, residents, service providers, community organizations, business owners	314 respondents
Survey	residents	647 respondents
National data sets	ABS: contextual data	

These projects have all used multiple methods (see table 1). The Work, Life and Health study, for example, (undertaken by Dr Natalie Skinner, Dr Jude Elton, Jocelyn Auer and myself) has involved

interviews and focus groups, a survey across a state health workforce and representative national surveys of work and life. The study investigates work–life relationships, to inform theory, practice and policy with a particular focus on key work–life transitions: that is entering the workforce, entering parenting and entering retirement.

The ‘Work, home and community’ study (led by Dr Pip Williams with Ken Bridge, Dr Jane Edwards and myself) examines how Australians are ‘putting together’ their changing work, households, services and communities, how workers and residents see the relationship between these elements, and what kinds of temporal and spatial alignments they need and are best facilitated by all tiers of government, employers, urban developers, community services and organisations¹. The project has been undertaken in ten communities across four states, in high and low socioeconomic suburbs. The study has employed multiple methods and multiple perspectives, including extensive interviews and focus groups with 314 residents, workers, teenagers, business and community groups, analysis of national statistics and a survey of residents. This study is reported on in poster session at this conference by Ken Bridge.

Empirical work in these studies has led us to search for, and try to construct, framing theory to help make sense of what we are observing about the ways in which work, home and community are ‘put together’ in a single country at a point in time. The conceptualisation below stands atop this empirical work. We have turned to conceptual help from the fields of work, industrial relations, gender and care (especially thinking that has tried to bring these together). We have also made use of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory and Voydanoff’s (2008) integration of demands and resources into the ecological approach she applies to work, family and community.

Existing theory about work, family and community

The theoretical work that exists in relation to work, family and community – largely undertaken in a multidisciplinary context often by other social science disciplines – is helpful but fuzzy and it leaves many inadequacies. As Patricia Voydanoff has observed the diversity of perspectives afoot in relation to analysis of work, family and community has

advantages and disadvantages. It may reflect a lack of theoretical focus that derives from the multiplicity of disciplines that conduct research on the work, family and community microsystems. These include sociology, psychology, organizational behaviour, family science, human development, social work, gerontology, family therapy, law and occupational health. This lack of focus makes it difficult to develop comprehensive yet manageable theoretical frameworks for research (2008:4).

Much of this research has been undertaken with only brief reference, if any, to employment or industrial relations scholarship. It can, however, be usefully assisted by the conceptual tools of industrial relations in significant ways.

Firstly, the deep analysis of power that runs through the field of industrial relations (with the exception of the unitarist school) is largely ignored in existing models of work, family and community and much empirical work is curiously inscrutable about power relations in the workplace. For example, ‘flexibility’ is a key category in work-family research; however, research often fails to distinguish flexibility that assists employers versus that which assists employees, or the complex force field within which flexibility arrangements evolve and are enacted. While there is growing attention to some expressions of gender power, the imbalance between employee and employer power is little recognised.

Secondly, existing models are over-individualistic in conception – perhaps reflecting the influence of psychology in particular and its methodological and conceptual approach.

¹ The project has investigated five questions:

- What do workers and those they live with seek from their work, homes and communities?
- What kinds of relationships do they seek between their workplaces, homes and communities?
- How do workers and families build their communities and sustain and strengthen their social fabric?
- Are these relationships and communities sustainable?
- What are the policy implications of the analysis for different levels and elements of government, as well as for employers, unions and community organisations?

Thirdly, much existing modelling and analysis treats 'work' as a 'black box' (eg Voydanoff 2008): industrial relations scholarship shows how outcomes in relation to work are the result of complex workplace and work relationships. These are worth unpacking, and best understood within 'national systems of capital, labor and product market institutions [that] provide economic actors with different opportunities, constraints, and resources (Streeck 1997; Thelen and Streeck 2005; Crouch 2005), for meeting the challenges of competition' (Appelbaum and Schmitt 2009: 6).

As many in the field of industrial relations have long understood, analysing work and workplace relations and outcomes requires the location of work within its larger political economy of product, capital and labour markets, gender regimes and social norms (Rubery 2009). These help explain national differences and change over time. What happens within the black box of work and the workplace is critical to the work-family-community interface.

Models of work, family and community need to allow greater complexity in relation to analysis of work and its political economy, if they are to help guide understanding of the situations of workers, their households and their communities, as well as future action to improve outcomes. It is here that the field of industrial relations can help illuminate the complex intersection of work, family and community.

Defining work, family and community

Analysis of work, home and community brings together the three vital domains where both economic production and social reproduction occur in a tight, mutual embrace. How should we define these three domains? We can do so either spatially (the *places* of workplace, the household, the street) or *relationally*: for example, family is made not only within the place of home but through relationships that transcend places. 'Community' is clearly a relational as well as a spatial concept: we increasingly make our communities at work and virtually (for example, by phone (see Wajcman et al, 2009) and through the internet). In this light we suggest the following relational definitions:

Work: includes work undertaken in a paid work relationship, some of which may be unpaid and some of which may be undertaken remotely from a workplace (ie in a car, while in transit, or from home). We include unpaid domestic and voluntary work in home and community domains.

Family: family is not the same as home or household. There are good reasons to prefer the place-based definition of home to 'family' with its connotation of nuclear family. However, for many people, family is more than a place: it is a set of dense relationships that can include family members beyond the conventional family. For this reason we define 'family' as people and relationships in the private sphere. Family includes those people who pool money and time to sustain their everyday life. (Of course, for many, family is much more than this.) In the case of a sole person living alone without other family or close friends/house mates, this will be a single person household. For others it will be an extended family that shares money and time in daily sustenance. By this definition, the nature of family is historically and culturally variable. However, for most households in a country like Australia 'family' will approximate the household, and the great majority will be single person or dual earner households, with and without children.

Community: recognising that a large literature exists on this front (Putnam 2000), we define 'community' as relationships of support and/or interaction between people that might be based on place, shared interest or identity. These relations are often geographically based and may be of different strengths and they are not always positive. They are, however, part of the demands and resources experienced by workers and households

The myth of separate worlds

Having defined these key domains, how do they relate to each other? In some ways, the field of industrial relations has been guilty of an error not uncommon in the social sciences: 'the myth of separate worlds' and the notion that work can be separated from the study of the rest of social life (Kanter 1989, Voydanoff 2008).

In some ways, this error matters less if one's analysis is static in time and place: for example, it is a study of factory work and relations between workers and their employers, in the context of a set of prevailing institutions and norms. However, even then, analysis of industrial relations without reference to the household and community context and to larger economic and social forces leaves much unsaid. For

example, most workers think about whether they have the backing of their households and communities before they enter a prolonged strike: if they lack support for their actions, any ambition to withdraw labour for a sustained period of time is likely to be thwarted. Throughout history, many workers and employers have come to recognise the power of a 'wives' auxiliary' and others have felt the helpful support of a community coalition - not least in Australia in 1998 during the waterfront dispute (Trinca and Davies 2000; Pocock 1999) or the 'Your Rights at Work' Campaign of 2007 when community support for union action against individualised, lower industrial standards contributed in large part to the fall of the federal government and – not for the first time in Australian history – cost a serving Prime Minister his seat (Muir 2008).

There is a sizeable body of research bringing analysis of at least the two spheres of work and care or work and family, and much of it applies a gender lens. This includes Joan William's (2000) analysis of gendered work regimes; Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg's (2001) model of 'shared work/valued care'. In the Australian case I have proposed a model of work-care systems (Pocock 2003, 2005). Connell's theory of a gender order has helped illuminate the gender regime within which work and family 'live'. There is also a growing body of research bringing into analysis the international nature of work-care regimes and their intersection with migration to construct diverse forms of citizenship: for example Parrenas' (2001) model of international work-care chains, Lister et al's 2007 analysis of work, care and regimes of citizenship in Europe, and the more recent collection edited by Luce (2008). Fan (2008) has provided a rich analysis of work, migration, state regime and the household in China.

However, while there is considerable work on work-care relationships, and consideration of how they intersect with migration in some settings, there is relatively little theorising or empirical work that brings together work, family and community into simultaneous analysis.

Ecological Systems Theory: Bringing work, home and community together

Recently Patricia Voyandof has made use of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (EST). This theory originally arose in relation to child . Bronfenbrenner's original model sets out four ecological levels as follows, each nested within the next, according to their immediacy to the developing child (see figure 1):

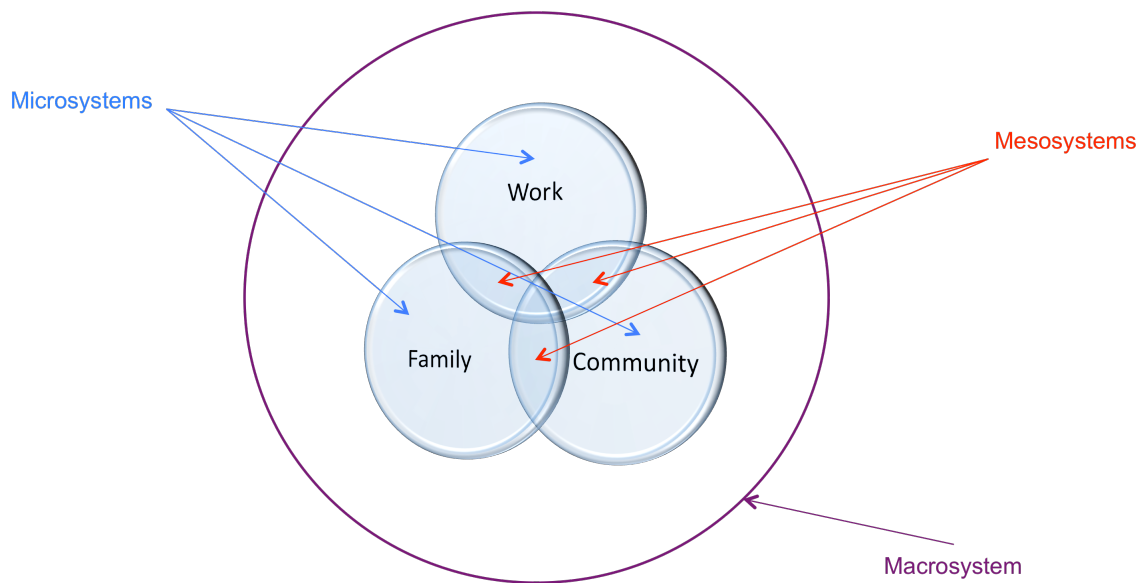
- **Microsystem:** this includes workplace, family and community domains in which face to face relationships occur
- **Mesosystem:** the how these microsystems intersect
- **Exosystems:** the external environment in which the person does not participate but is affected by (eg the school system in the case of a working parent)
- **Macrosystem:** the over-arching patterns of culture, institutions and broad belief systems

Patricia Voydanoff (2007) has taken ecological systems theory and adapted it for analysis of work, family and community (which she takes care to define). She adds to this picture by utilising the notion of demands and resources in each sphere. We have applied this approach in relation to teens and their work, family and community context (Williams, Bridge and Pocock 2008).

This ecological approach, overlaid with consideration of the demands and resources in each sector, has some important strengths. It takes us away from the trivial, unhelpful and individualistic notion of 'balance'. It locates the three interlocking spheres of work, family and community in a larger macrosystem. It encourages study of the 'microsystem' in each domain, as well as the 'mesosystem' of interaction between the three core domains, and implies that each part in figure 1 creates demands and resources. This ecosystem constructs outcomes for individuals, families, communities and workplaces and we have employed it to try to make sense of work, home and community interaction in Australia (Williams and Pocock 2009).

However, helpful as it is, this model is incomplete, and the field of industrial relations can help by adding depth to two levels of the model: firstly – standing on a long history of conceptual and analytical work - by drawing attention to the need for deeper analysis of 'work' and secondly by helping specify the framing elements of the macrosystem. In both these contributions, an industrial relations' perspective brings to bear the power relations that are embedded in this ecosystem – both within the workplace and at the macro-social and political levels.

Figure 1: An ecological systems model of work, family and community



Each domain, and each intersection, creates **demands and resources**

Note: This model draws on Voydanoff's adaption of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model

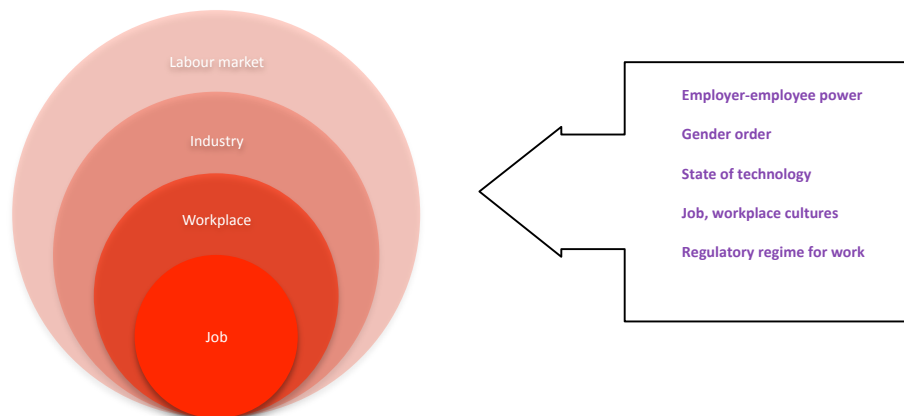
Ecological systems theory needs more: Work is a black box

In Voydanoff's model, 'work' is a black box which needs unpacking. Industrial relations scholars theorise work as a complex domain, which has at least four levels worth distinguishing if we are to make sense of how 'work' affects workers and their families and communities:

1. The job: occupation, workload, wages, hours, worker led flexibility, schedule, supervision, job culture, job-gender, unionisation/voice, regulatory regime and practice/enforcement;
2. The workplace: size, supervision, workplace-culture, hours, unionisation/voice, regulatory regime and practice/enforcement, gender composition/culture, management strategy (high performance/low road), capital/labour ratio, ownership structure, technology, financialisation;
3. The industry: product market, profitability, nature of competition, exposure to trade, technology, gender composition, regulatory regime and practice/enforcement;
4. The national/international labour market: unemployment rate, gender composition, regulatory regime and practice/enforcement, industry composition of employment.

Our discipline's large empirical studies unpack these levels, for example the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys of 1990 and 1995, and the British Workplace Relations Surveys (The US is yet to enjoy one and Australia's is now 14 years out of date).

Figure 2: Unpacking the black box of work



The importance of these levels to making sense of work, and how it intersects with other domains is illustrated by the recently concluded Russell Sage Foundation study of business strategy and labour market institutions in the US and five European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK). This study draws attention to the great variation in both employer strategy and institutions, and their operation, which has defining effects on job, workplace, industry and national labour market outcomes.

The analysis – overviewed by Eileen Appelbaum and John Schmitt (2009) – shows how collective bargaining, minimum wage regulation and social welfare systems (especially their level of inclusiveness) explain variations in the incidence of low paid workers and their fortunes. The study draws attention to ‘the interplay of firms’ business strategy and national institutions in determining’ labour market outcomes’ (in this case, the incidence of low pay and its characteristics).

This study points to how our analysis of work, family and community, needs to unpack work and its characteristics in a nested analysis of job, workplace, industry and national and international labour market contexts. There is nothing pre-determined about how a particular job will affect workers’ family or community life: this affect is shaped by local employer strategies (high road/low road investment and skill strategies), the structure of finance and ownership in the firm and industry, the gender composition and care-load of workers, exposure to national and international competition and trade, unionisation, the age and skills of the workforce and so on.

Further, our empirical study of work, family and community in the Australian context over the past few years leads us to suggest that there are five aspects of ‘work’ and its context that cross all four of the levels of ‘work’ from the job, to the workplace, the industry and the labour market. These are:

1. The relative power of employers and employees;
2. the gender order;
3. the prevailing state of technology;
4. the cultures of the job, workplace, industry, and labour market; and
5. the regulatory regime around work, including levels of enforcement and embedded social norms which actually amount to a form of regulation (Rubery 2009).

Specifying the larger context

We have suggested that the ‘work’ terrain in EST can be assisted by the analytical tools of industrial relations. Similarly, the existing body of empirical industrial relations (and sociological) research helps enrich the specification of the macrosystem of a Work, Family and Community Ecosystem and the demands and resources it creates. Beyond the range of factors shaping what happens in the domain of work, the following dimensions – which I do not develop in detail - will shape the ‘varieties of work, home and families’ we observe:

1. The ‘variety of capitalism’ and **the nature of the welfare state:**

- Especially the ‘work-care regime’ (public/private provision, cost accessibility and quality);
- 2. The **migration regime**, and flows of internal and external migrants and their governance and work and citizenship rights;
- 3. The **gender regime** (including norms about motherhood, fatherhood, women/men, hours norms, and the sexual division of labour);
- 4. The **demographic and health** structure of the population (an older, younger or sicker population may have a higher need for care);
- 5. The **technological regime** (the widespread possibility of remote working can change the spatial and temporal terms of work for some);
- 6. The **stage of industrialisation** (compare China, India, Australia, US);
- 7. The extent of exposure to **trade** and the structure of **industry** (economies with high or low levels of global integration are likely to have different work, family and community systems).

Empirical analysis of an Australian Work, Family and Community Ecosystem

In the Australian context, at the beginning of the 21st Century, how would this look based on an empirical assessment of the demands and resources in the three domains of work, family and community and their intersection, located in the current macrosystem?

Table 3 Australia’s Work, Family and Community Ecosystem and its Demands and Resources

WORK Demands (reverse=Resource)	FAMILY Demands (reverse=Resource)	COMMUNITY Demands (reverse=Resource)	X-DOMAIN Demands (reverse=Resource)
Unsupportive supervision	Dependent parents/grandparents/other	community activities that take time*	poor spatial alignment of WFC
Unsupportive workplace culture	dependent children*	community activities that take resources* (eg money)	Poor temporal alignment of WFC
Overload	unfair division of domestic labour	poor household technology (eg computer)	poor transport options (cost, timing, regularity, no cars)
Long hours*	dual worker/earner households*	slow internet, no internet	poor household technology (eg computer)
Involuntary overtime	one parent/worker households	limited local walkways, bike tracks, parks	slow internet, no internet
Poor fit of hours to preferences	unsupportive partner	no dog walking*	limited local jobs
Job insecurity	children who do not help	no children*	limited local education (Early childhood, school, higher ed, VET)
Employee-centred flexibility*	lower income	no shared local meeting places/'third spaces'	limited local services
Little autonomy	poor transport options	Houses don't open to street /no verandahs	poor local facilities (esp libraries, education, care)
'unsocial' hours*	unaffordable, inaccessible, low quality care options	no services/meeting points for mothers, teens, aged	no mobile phone*
Poor access to leave (sick, holidays, parental)	unsupportive inaccessible grandparents	poor transport	no shared local meeting places/'third spaces'
Low income, high income*	unsupportive inaccessible extended family	no mobile phone*	low income
no remote working*	high housing costs		low social interaction, trust
long commutes*	long commutes		shallow social connection
no mobile phone*	no/poor household technology (eg computer)		
	no mobile phone*		
	slow internet, no internet		

*can be both a resource and a demand

Table 3 sets out a tentative taxonomy, based on our recent qualitative and quantitative research (for various reports on which this is based: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/default.asp>). In some cases, aspects of a domain are both resources and demands. In the field of work, for example working long hours can generate income (an important resource) but create a stressed, time-poor parent and rob the family of parental time, thus acting as a resource and a demand. In the family sphere mobile phones can act as vital coordinating family resources but their cost is a significant demand. Grandparents can be both a childcare resource and demand care themselves. In the community domain, giving time to community activities can both create resources and mean additional demands.

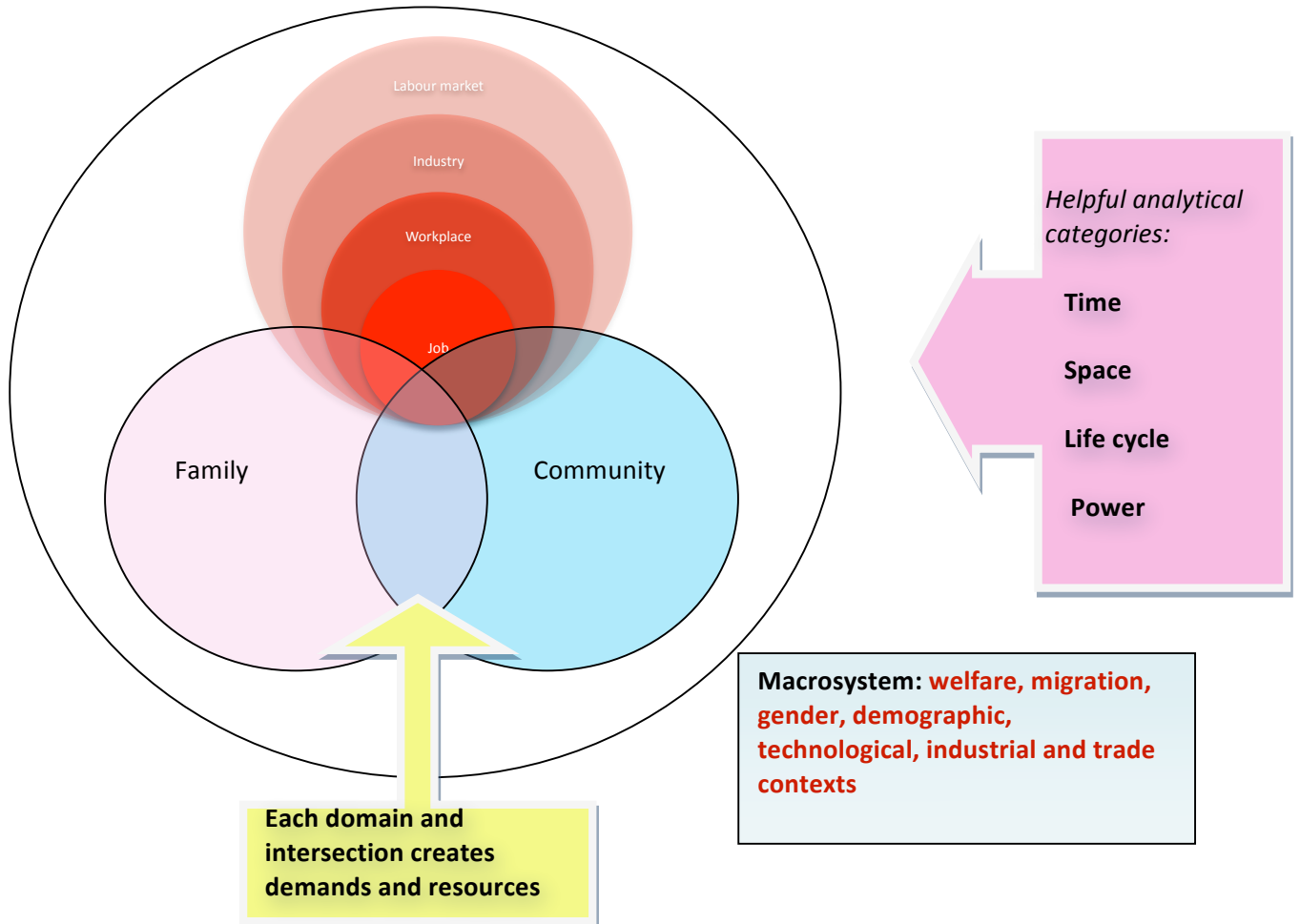
Our empirical work also suggests that some relationships are not linear: for example compared to middle incomes, both higher (over A\$90,000) and lower (less than \$30,000) personal incomes are associated with worse work, family and community outcomes (Pocock, Skinner and Ichii 2009).

The factors set out in table suggest three other aspects of WHC ecological systems which in our view consistently affect outcomes:

1. **Time:** including the hours spent in each domain, the predictability of hours in each, the fit of hours spent in each domain with personal and household preferences, the fit of schedules in the household, how the experience of time in each of the three domains spillover into other domains (ie intensity of work or care), employee say and control over time, timing of activity in each sphere (eg working at night, caring at night), the way that schedules in each domain fit with others (eg school, work hours);
2. **Space:** how spatially separated and distant from each other these domains are, how long it takes to cover these distances, whether spaces are virtually connected;
3. **Life-stage:** work, family and community outcomes vary by life-stage including for infants, children, teens, adults in pre-family formation, adults forming families, parents, pre-retirees, retirees and the aged
4. **Power:** that is relative power between socio-economic groups, employers and employees, gender and ethnic groups, including forms of citizenship that are available to migrants. This includes the nature and availability of 'voice' in social and political arrangements.

How these things work, constructs the well-being of those who live in the ecosystem, their economic productivity and the ease of their social reproduction. Strong, healthy, inclusive communities, productive workplaces with low levels of turnover, absenteeism, injury and illness, high levels of worker well-being and satisfaction and engagement, and high levels of family well-being, coherence and support (for infants, children, teens, and adults) will reflect an ecosystem that is functioning well. Figure 3 sets out a figure which brings all of these elements together.

Figure 3 A Work, Family and Community Ecosystem



How does An Ecosystem of Work, Family and Community help?

Systems models like this are weak theory: they do not tell us what to expect when we begin analysing a system, or how change in one will necessarily affect another. However, such an attempt at modelling also helps. It might provide a useful frame for international comparison. It alerts us to factors that empirical and theoretical work to date suggests *matter* in trying to make sense of a work, family and community context. The model more consciously defines the critical domains, adds some depth to their discussion (especially the domain of work), employs the useful notions of demands and resources in analysing the three micro domains, forces us to see these domains in interaction, appropriately nests the core domains in their larger macrocontexts, and suggests that time, space and life-course perspectives are useful categories to bear in mind when considering the workings of such systems.

Such a model allows us to see where the levers are for action and to be clearer about where most of our research has been located, and the gaps we have given much less attention to.

For example, in Australia, there has been considerable research and policy attention to some ‘work’ issues, and not much in others that matter: we have focussed on leave and flexibility, but given less attention to job security, job overload and unsupportive workplace cultures. The model suggests that individualistic pursuit of ‘work-life balance’ is likely to be an often futile struggle where settings in the key domains of work, family and community overshadow personal effort.

In the family domain, we have focussed mostly on the effects of dependent children, when many other issues matter.

We have generally under-attended the community domain, and its interaction with the other two. However, these interactions are likely to be very important in understanding the social inclusion/exclusion effects of different systems.

The demands and resources in each domain and across them vary a great deal by the socio-economic status of individuals and the socio-economic status and social capital of suburbs (Williams and Pocock forthcoming 2009) as well as the other dimensions of the macro system in which they are located.

Conclusion

We need to stop over-researching the known (ie ‘employee-centred flexibility matters’) and spend more time researching the unknown. For example, what kinds of flexibility, workplace culture, job redesign or leave matter? How do these vary by worker, life-cycle stage, industry? Why is there such a policy-practice gap in so many workplaces? Why – knowing that leave, flexibility and workplace culture, for example, matter so much – is there such a slow change in these arrangements in many workplaces? What difference does employee-voice make to change? What are the implications of the new work, family, community and migration patterns in India and China for the larger world?

A major area for future research should move beyond obvious and established relationships, to the linkages between research findings and change – at the level of the job, workplace, industry and larger labour market. Why are countries like the US so slow to introduce even very minimal forms of paid leave, like an annual holiday? Why does good evidence make little difference to practice in many places? Is this a weakness in translation by researchers, or a deafness in the ears of policy makers? Is cost the major barrier, or are there deep patterns of masculine or maternalist resistance to change - which is so critical to women? Is the ‘breadwinner/maternal care imaginary’, and its deep roots in the social and individual psyche in some countries, standing in the way of advance? Or do we need to look no further than the cost/benefit calculations that surround changes in policy and action: do they simply cost too much and are employers right to resist their impost? Do we have enough research on the cost/benefit calculations about innovative work practices and their outcomes? We do more and more research proving the obvious (which has often already been established many times over), while expending much less effort on the financial penalties and benefits of particular actions and policies, including the hidden externality costs and benefits of policy. There are some important exceptions to this – for example the Canadian calculations about the health budget implications of poor work-life outcomes (Higgins and Duxbury).

A sizeable research agenda exists.

Industrial relations is hopefully more than ‘merely a crossroads where a number of disciplines meet’ as Dunlop put it many years ago. His attempt at theory building was an effort to rehabilitate and defend the intellectual reputation and contribution of his field.

We do not need to be so defensive: indeed I believe we can be optimistic about the relevance and usefulness of the concepts and tools of industrial relations scholarship. But we do need to evolve. We need to better conceptualise the categories that are pivotal to making sense of the world of work now, especially its interface with home and community, at a moment of great transformation in all three. If we are to be a social science that matters, we need to rise to the challenge of pursuing problems that ‘matter to the local, national and international communities in which we live’, by pursuing issues of values and power, and communicating the results of our research to fellow citizens (Flyvberg 2002: 166). In this conception, as Flyvberg suggests, three questions matter: Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done? (2002: 60).

Analysis of work, family and community that keeps in view power relations between employers and employees, as well gender relations, and which properly understands the domain of work, and its larger

macro social, economic and political context - in its layered complexity - is essential. Perspectives that de-individualise analysis, and give appropriate weight to the complex social and political contexts in which work, family and community come together, is currently missing from much research on work, family and community, as is a spatial and temporal frame of analysis. Research that goes beyond what we already know, to considering the levers for change, and what can assist their better operation, as well as the sources of resistance to change, is also essential.

Industrial relations scholarship can offer help in addressing all these challenges in relation to the important, complex analysis of work, family and community. This promises an exciting research terrain with great potential public significance for men, women and children in many countries around the globe.

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ⁱ We also acknowledge Jocelyn Auer, Jude Elton, Reina Ichii, Ken Bridge and Jane Edwards to the work that is represented in this presentation, and conversations with Eileen Appelbaum about some of the ideas in this paper.