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The offer of flexible working hours within companies

A comparison between Sweden and the Netherlands

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This thesis examines the variation in the offer of flexible working hours within companies. According to the neo-institutional theory, the rational choice theory and the organizational adaptation theory, four organizational characteristics have an influence on the implementation of flexible working hours. A comparison is made between Sweden and the Netherlands. Swedish companies offer more flexible working hours than Dutch companies. A comparison between the two countries indicates the importance of the country context that is related to the influence of organizational characteristics. Differences that are found can be used to form an adequate policy to stimulate the implementation of flexible working hours within companies.

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Introduction

The labour market keeps on changing over time. Production and work pressure differ widely from ten and more years ago (Byrne, 2005). The requirements of employees have changed as work pressure has increased. One of the modern values of employees is a well-balanced work-life policy to limit work stress and work-family conflicts (Byrne, 2005).

Changing employees' values is one of the results of the shift of a traditional breadwinner-homemaker family to a dual-earner family at the end of the twentieth century. This shift was a reaction to the increased participation of women in the labour market (Van der Valk, 2004). The labour participation of women in the Netherlands has increased from 49,8% of all women between 15 to 65 years old in 1996 to 63,8% in 2011 (CBS, 2012). Due to this new division of the labour market work-family conflicts gain more attention. The relationship between work-family conflict and employees' satisfaction has been a prominent topic of many recent studies (Bruck et al. 2000; Roehling et al. 1995). The increased labour participation of women results in an increased demand for childcare, work-life policies and equality between men and women in the workplace (Fine-Davis et al., 2004). Family-friendly initiatives should encourage a balance between men and women by alleviating women from the double roles they fulfil as a labour force and in domestic tasks and encourage men to participate more in the household (Fine-Davis et al., 2004). One of the main goals of governmental work-life policies is to improve the balance between paid work and the unpaid domestic work. Workplace policies consist of arrangements such as flexible work scheduling, child care assistance, family-leave policies, and other policies which strive for the avoidance of work-life conflicts (Fleetwood, 2007; Roehling et al., 1995).

The definition of work-life balance is according to Clark (2000) "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict". Another definition has been given by Guest (2002), he describes work-life balance as a "perceived balance between work and the rest of life". The work-life policies were introduced to encourage women to participate more in the labour market and on the other side to make the labour market more available for women (O'Conner, 1992). This is not the only purpose of governmental work-life policies, it is also introduced to encourage men to become a part of the caregiving in the domestic environment and to break through the idea of a sexual

division in caregiving (Doherty, 2004). The increase of dual-career families has also changed the attitudes of men toward policies which are more family-friendly (Lee, 1991)

The main focus of this thesis is not the perspective of employees but the motive of companies to offer work-life policies. According to Russell (2011) the offer of work-life policies is advantageous for the wellbeing of employees. They experience higher job satisfaction, less work pressure and less work-life conflict (Orpen, 1981; Russell, 2011). But in our capitalistic labour market, money often has more power than the voice of employees. Why then do companies invest in the implementation of work-life policies and what is their benefit? The study of Roehling et al (2001) shows us a positive relationship between work-life policies and employee loyalty. This could be a reason for a company to implement work-life policies but it won't be the only motive. Other studies suggest forces from outside a company play a role in this process (Goodstein, 1994). Certain organizational characteristics determine the extent to which a company conforms to these pressures.

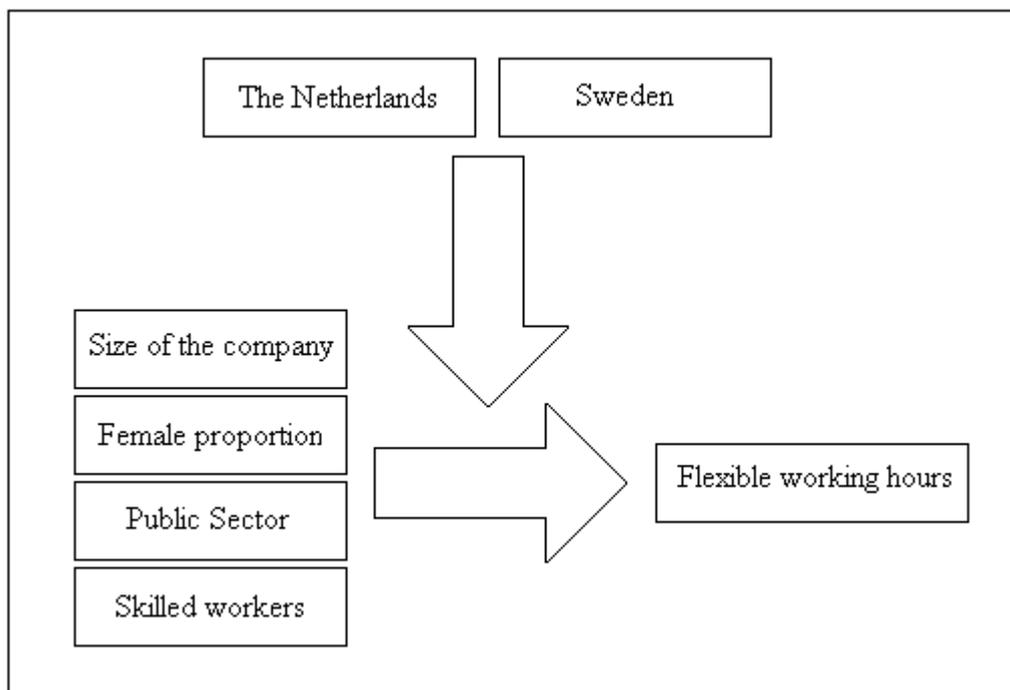
This thesis will specifically emphasize the offer of *flexible working hours* within companies. With the offer of flexible working arrangements employers give their employees the possibility to diverge from traditional working hours, while still working the same amount of hours. Flexible working arrangements can include night or weekend work, but are mainly used as so called 'balancing-time-accounts', where working hours can vary above or below standard hours (Burgoon, 2009). Flexible work scheduling in particular is an interesting, current topic; not many studies have considered this specific topic yet. It enables employees to keep on working fulltime, while setting their own working hours. This is an economically efficient solution for both the employee and the company. Employees don't lose production time and maintain a larger feeling of autonomy (Russell, 2011). Additionally, varying working hours enables employees to avoid traffic jams and this process may in general reduce traffic jams in general.

In addition this thesis will investigate what kind of differences exist between countries in their policies pertaining to work-life balance and the actual flexible working possibilities offered by companies. In this way countries can be compared to one another and similarities and differences can be found. Two countries will be compared with each other in a European context. It will be examined if there is a difference in the offer of flexible working arrangements within companies between Sweden and the Netherlands,

two countries which vary in their degree of state support with respect to work-life policies.

The general purpose of this thesis is to examine to what extent the offer of work-life policies within companies is dependent on organizational characteristics. A comparison between Sweden and the Netherlands will be made to examine whether the effect of the organizational characteristics on the offer of flexible working hours differs between those countries. This results into the following research question: *‘To what extent does the offer of flexible working hours within companies depend on organizational characteristics and what is the difference between Sweden and the Netherlands?’* Corresponding with this research question figure 1 shows the conceptual model.

Figure 1. Conceptual model effect of organizational characteristics on the offer of flexible working hours in Sweden and the Netherlands.



Most Scandinavian countries enjoy a long tradition of state support, while in other countries like the Netherlands or Germany state support is not that common yet and just relatively modest (Den Dulk et al., 2007). The context of both countries will be further amplified in the next chapter.

This thesis will contribute to the knowledge of flexible working hours in the social sciences. First of all it will describe what the governmental work-life policies are in Sweden and in the Netherlands. Subsequently it will examine the way companies in these

countries offer flexible working hours. A lot of research has already been done with respect to these subjects, but most of them don't combine country context with the offer of flexible working hours. More importantly, the specific aspect, 'flexible working hours' as a component of 'work-life policies', hasn't been examined in detail. Most of the articles about flexible working arrangements only focus on work-life policies or only on flexible working hours within companies (Den Dulk, 2001; Duvander, 2002; OECD, 2005; Schøne, 2005; Ronsen, 2002). Even when this is done most of these articles compare Europe as a whole or several countries; in this thesis only two specific countries will be compared, the effect of this is that it allows us to go into greater depth (Brewster, 1997; Den Dulk, 2001; Kangas, 2007; Klau, 1985). This study will give a more specified insight into the mechanisms which are at work in the decision of a company to implement flexible working hours.

In addition to the fact that this thesis will contribute to the current knowledge in the social sciences, it can also be considered to have a societal relevance. Flexible working in the Netherlands is a 'hot topic'. Since 2010, a national week of 'The New Working' has been organized every year to make companies more familiar with flexible working. This week has not only been organized by independent organizations and companies, but has also received governmental funding and support (N&M, 2012). In a speech the Dutch minister of finances Jager said the government in the Netherlands finds it more than necessary to introduce a more dynamic and flexible work environment. He remarked in this speech that it is also important for the economy and that the government prefers to invest in companies which provide flexibility for their employees than to invest in 'classical' companies (Rijksoverheid, 2011). Flexible working arrangements are important to the government. In this way women and men can combine volunteering, education, spare time and domestic tasks in an easier way (Rijksoverheid, 2012). The results of this study may be of particular interest to governments which are trying to convert their labour market into a more flexible and dynamic one. The knowledge generated in this study can help governments in organizing an appropriate policy to reach companies.

All in all it is clear that the offer of flexible working hours is marked highly on the political agenda. Nevertheless there still is a discrepancy between the political agenda and what is being done in the labour market, despite the fact that scientists and politics are pleading for more flexible working time arrangements (Christenunie, 2012; Brouwer,

2011). By making a comparison between Sweden and the Netherlands, it can be discovered if there is a difference in the offer of flexible working hours between Sweden and the Netherlands. It can be examined if this discrepancy is due to differences in the characteristics of companies and if the effect of companies' characteristics varies between the countries. With the help of this research, it can be examined if the country context is of importance in the process of implementing work-life policies.

To test our hypothesis which will be explained in the theory chapter, and to answer our research question, data from the European Survey on Working Time and Work Life Balance (ESWT) will be used. This data contains comprehensive information of detailing workplace- and state work-life policies all over Europe. To show the differences between Sweden and the Netherlands, a small chapter about country characteristics will be introduced. A methods and results section will follow which shows the statistical test that will examine the hypotheses. This thesis will end with a discussion and conclusion section.

Country characteristics

This section will provide more information about the fundamental country characteristics and differences of Sweden and the Netherlands. Most Scandinavian countries, like Sweden, enjoy a long history of state support, while in other countries, like the Netherlands or Germany, state support is not that common yet and just relatively modest (Den Dulk et al., 2007). Sweden, compared to other European countries, has the most companies offering flexible working hours for their employees, and has the most employees who take advantage of flexible working hours arrangements (Kullander, 2009). In the Netherlands the attitude towards flexible working is quite positive, but even so, only one third of all Dutch employees utilise these arrangements (Rijksoverheid, 2010-1). Ninety percent of employees can't make use of flexible working hours because they are not allowed to do so by their employer. If the option of flexible working were provided by their employer, sixty percent of them would probably or certainly choose flexible working hours (Rijksoverheid, 2010-2). According to this information, it can be stated there is a need on the demand side from employees for flexible working hours, but it is not yet provided by companies in the Netherlands. Around 45% of all establishments offer flexible working hours in the Netherlands, and in these establishments, 65% of the employees are allowed to make use of these arrangements. In contrast with Sweden, which is on top of the list of European countries, 70% of all establishments offer flexible working time arrangements for their employees (Eurofound, 2008).

To help conform to the changing needs of employees, the government introduced legislation at the institutional level. In the Netherlands, the law 'Labour and Care Taking' is being introduced, but also the government provides a law to regulate the length of labour time. According to the law, it is allowed for an employee to choose to work more or less hours, and also there is legislation covering child services (Warmerdam, 2008)

In Sweden there is clear distinction between three types of governmental arrangements toward work-life balance. First of all, the Swedish government tries to inform the employer on whether or not working environments work well. Second of all, labour legislation deals with labour legislation issues; not with public employment legislation. Finally, there is a wage formation which helps as mediation in labour disputes (Regeringskansliet, 2012)

Theory

In order to answer the main research question, three social-economic theories will be used. In this section the theories will be illustrated and the hypotheses which are important for this thesis will be constructed. Firstly, the neo-institutional theory will be described. This theory analyses and explains the motivation of companies to implement workplace policies, and describes the role of environmental forces on companies. The second theory, the organizational adaptation theory, has the same groundings as the neo-institutional theory, but is more extended. The third theory, the rational choice theory, is complementary to the neo-institutional theory as well. This theory emphasizes the decisions of rational actors concerning the implementation of work place policies in companies.

Neo-Institutional Theory and Rational Choice Theory

The neo institutional theory is a well-known theory which gives an explanation for the decisions considering work-life policies. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) were some of the first authors to examine this theory, trying to explain homogeneity, or isomorphism, between companies. Since the second half of the 20th century this theory has been used more and more; mostly in economic situations.

This theory states that companies will maintain a certain policy to achieve access to resources and support by stakeholders (DiMaggio et al., 1983; Doh et al., 2009). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) analyse this process and the associated mechanisms of isomorphism in companies. This means that the organization and policy of companies are starting to become more similar; whether this is the intention of rational actors or not. They distinguish three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs; coercive, mimetic and normative processes. According to Doh et al., (2009), Scott (1995) identified a similar framework to understand the role of institutions in social life by distinguishing three mechanisms through which companies act; regulative, normative and cognitive. The normative aspect which is introduced by DiMaggio and Powell, and is extended by Scott is the most important aspect for this thesis and will be further explained. This normative approach includes values and norms, which contain expectations of a company's policy. Legitimacy and institutionalization are closely intertwined. According to Suchman (1995), "legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions". Legitimate companies conform to societal

expectations and therefore they are accepted, valued and taken for granted (Aldrich et al., 1994; Meyer et al., 1977). An important aspect of this process is 'reputation'. Bromley (2001) defines reputation as "a distribution of opinions about an entity, which results in a collective image about that actor". According to Roberts and Dowling (2002) reputation is "a representation of a company's past actions and future prospects". The reputation of a company is important for its success. Over the course of their existence companies build a reputation which they can't afford to lose, because comparison between companies is usually based on this aspect (Doh et al., 2009).

Values concerning work-life policies are different in every country. In some countries these kinds of policies are higher valued than in others, due to higher work-life conflicts (Crompton et al., 2006). The importance of work-life policies, or basically of all workplace policies depends on the type of economy which is present in a country and on the culture at the labourmarket. This value depends on the proportion of female labour and how much it is appreciated within a country to combine labour with family care (Crompton et al., 2006). The more emancipated a country is, the larger the female participation at the labour market will be. Gornick (1999) measured that in social democratic countries such as Sweden, Finland and Denmark the participation of women in the labour market is higher than in conservative countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, which is higher than in liberal countries, such as Canada and the US. In social democratic cultures, men are expected to be more helpful in the household. Societal and governmental pressure to stimulate the work life balance will be stronger when values concerning work-life balance are more present in a certain culture (Crompton et al., 2006). A company will not only be more likely to conform to pressure from outside, the homogenic policies of other companies concerning work-life balance can influence their proper policies. Isomorphism will result in the same work-life policies in different organizations (DiMaggio et al., 1983).

Companies which are more visible to the public are more likely to conform to societal pressure (Den Dulk et al., 2010; DiMaggio et al., 1983; Doh et al., 2009). According to Rivera (2004) large companies experience stronger institutional pressure, due to their higher visibility. In order to retain their reputation and legitimacy, organizations respond this societal pressure. Thereby, larger companies are seen as playing a leadership role in environmental protection (Hoffman, 1999).

The rational choice theory is complementary to the institutional approach. According to this theory, actors, in this case companies, consider benefits and costs, and act in their advantage (Kleemans, 2001). When the benefits of implementing work life policies

are higher than the costs, organizations will support this policy. Potential costs are turnover and absenteeism of employees. The degree to which an organization responds to outside pressure is dependent on varying factors, which could be beneficial or not. When the pressure of the society is higher, the benefits of implementing flexible working hour arrangements are higher, as are the costs of failure to do so (Marquis, 2003). According to Geneen (1997), managers conform to these institutional pressures because of peer pressure, they fear losing prestige towards others. He says that this mechanism will 'spur them to action'. The costs and benefits of work-life policies are dependent on organizational and institutional conditions. Because large companies benefit of economies on scale, their costs of implementation of work-life policies per employee are lower than for small companies (Den Dulk et al., 2010). Besides, large companies often have a human resource management which notices and acts towards the demands of their personnel (Den Dulk et al., 2010; Morgan et al., 1992). Therefore the organizational characteristic *size* will be the first variable to be examined in this thesis. This will lead to the first hypothesis, H1: *'The larger a company is, the more flexible working hours it will offer.'*

The normative pressure in Sweden is higher than in the Netherlands, Sweden has more state work-life support than the Netherlands. Companies in Sweden and the Netherlands will both conform to outside pressure to maintain their legitimacy. Larger companies will conform more to this pressure because they are more visible to the public. In Sweden this pressure is higher and so large companies in Sweden are expected to offer more flexible working hours than large companies in the Netherlands. Hypothesis two illustrates what is expected, H2: *'Large companies in Sweden will offer more flexible working hours than large companies in the Netherlands.'*

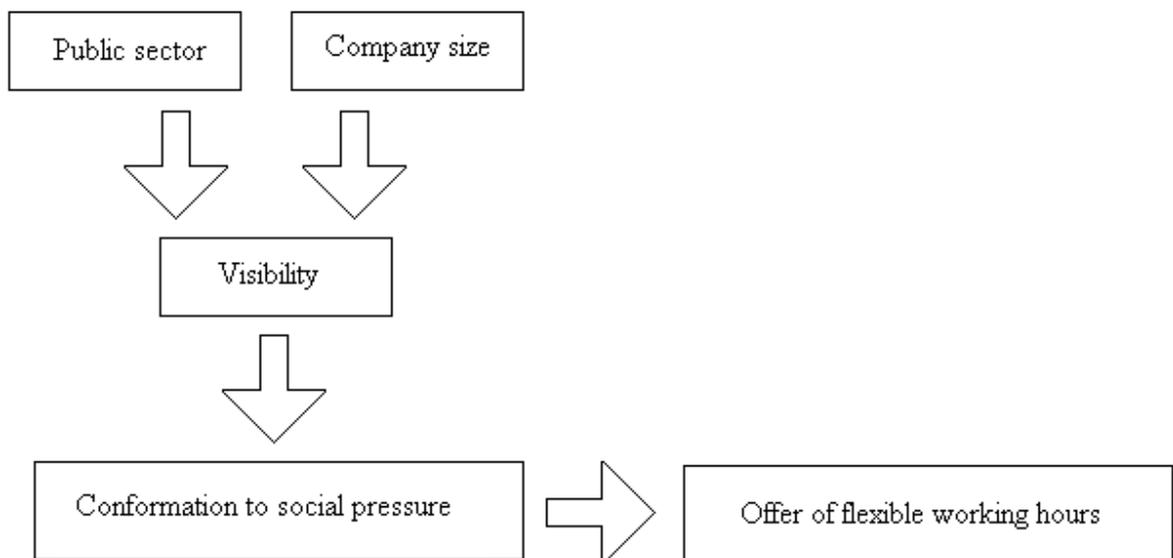
The process of retaining legitimacy and their reputation is even stronger among organizations in the public sector. Companies in the public sector are likely to be more sensitive for outside pressure because they are more visible to the public than companies in the private sector (Den Dulk et al., 2010). Additionally, companies in the public sector are often seen as role models. Ministries, federal bodies and local authorities are examples of organizations in the public sector (Den Dulk et al., 2010; DiMaggio, 1983). The third hypothesis will test this and is the following, H3: *'Companies in the public sector will offer more flexible working hours than companies in the private sector.'*

The societal pressure in Sweden is expected to be higher than in the Netherlands. Companies in the public sector are more visible than companies in the private sector due to their visibility. Therefore companies in the public sector in Sweden are expected to offer

more flexible working hours than companies in the private sector. This leads to the fourth hypothesis, H4: '*Companies in Sweden which operate in the public sector will offer more flexible working hours than companies in the public sector in the Netherlands*'.

Figure 2 shows the theoretical framework of the neo-institutional theory and the rational choice theory. The visibility of a company affects the way the company responds to the forces of the environment. For a large company which is more visible than smaller companies, the rational choice (or market strategy) will be to eventually choose to implement flexible working hour arrangements. Also the sector in which a company operates determines their visibility to the public. Companies in the public sector are more visible and will therefore conform more to social pressure which will lead to the offer of flexible working hours.

Figure 2. Theoretical model Neo-Institutional Theory & Rational Choice Theory



The neo-institutional theory has been examined by several empirical studies. For instance as a reaction on Di Maggio et al., (1983) Mizruchi and Fein (1999) tested their statements about isomorphism and the neo-institutional theory and concluded that they had provided evidence for their theory. Goodstein (1994) also supported this theory and suggested that “the development of institutional theory has led to significant insights regarding the importance of institutional environments to organizational structures and actions” (Goodstein 1994). This theory has been tested in several other scientific research studies (Fligstein, 1991; King, 2000; Rivera, 2004).

Organizational Adaptation Theory

The organizational adaptation theory has the same foundation as the neo institutional theory, but is a bit more extended. The focus of this theory is on the characteristics of an organization, rather than on societal influences. This theory examines the process of how companies recognize societal pressure and in what way they conform to it (Goodstein, 1995).

Gender composition of the workforce is one of the factors which determine the way in which organizations recognize social pressure (Goodstein, 1995). This approach states that, the greater the proportion of the female employment staff is, the more responsive organizations are to societal pressure. The proportion of female personnel has a direct effect on the offer of flexible working hours. Women are still more often in charge of the household and children. Therefore, female employees need work-life policies more than male employees, and make the strongest demands for it (Felstead, 2002). The larger the proportion of female workforce the larger the demands for work-life policies will be. Especially flexible working hours are of high value for women who need to combine work with family. This leads to hypothesis five, H5: *'Companies with a high proportion of female staff will offer more flexible working hours'*

Again, a comparison between Sweden and the Netherlands will be made. Data from the European Survey on Working Time and Work Life Balance show that Sweden obtains more female employees than the Netherlands. Considering the mechanism that women demand more work-life policies than men, it can be expected that in Sweden companies with a high proportion of female staff will offer more flexible working hours than in the Netherlands. The sixth hypothesis will follow, H6: *'In Sweden companies with a high proportion of female staff are more likely to offer flexible working hours than companies with a high proportion of female staff in the Netherlands.'*

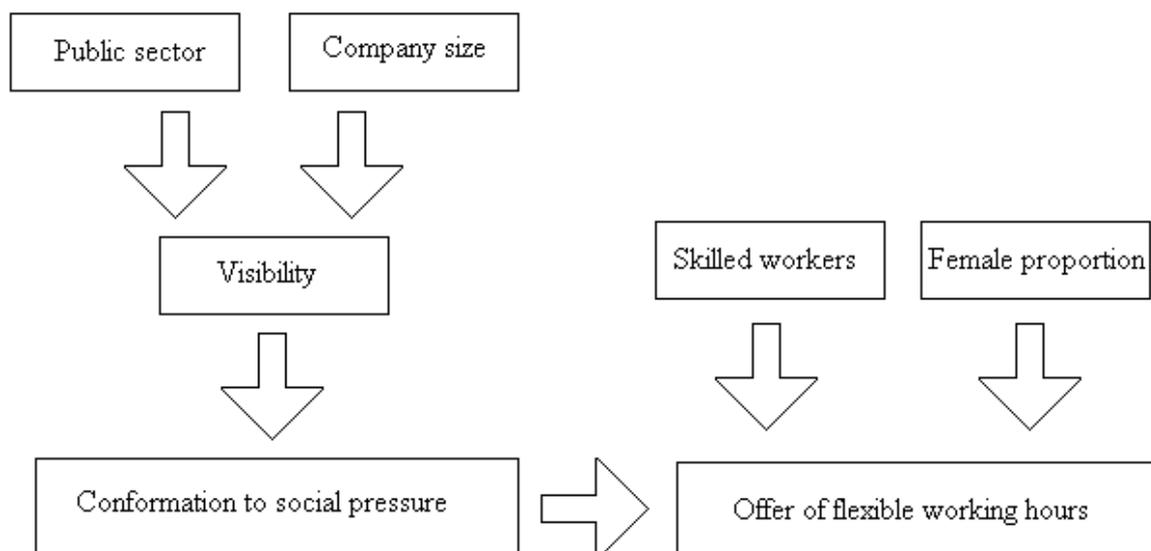
The extent to which employers introduce work-life policies also depends on the type of work. Professional and managerial employees are more likely to switch employers. In some professions for example, the employee is more mobile than in other professions. Employers usually don't want to lose their highly skilled personnel and hence, are more likely to agree to their demands. The demands of highly skilled, and therefore more mobile, employees who are difficult to replace, are taken more seriously (Felstead, 2002). Additionally, highly skilled personnel have more power than non skilled personnel because they are scarcer. In order to retain their highly skilled personnel a company will conform as much as possible to the demands of skilled staff. The costs of searching for and hiring new

personnel will be higher than implementing new work-life policies. Congruent to the rational choice theory this will lead to benefits (retaining skilled staff) which exceed the costs (recruitment of new staff), and subsequently this will lead to conformation to the demands of the personnel (Appelbaum et al., 2005; Kossek & Friede, 2006). This theory leads to hypothesis seven, H7: *'Companies with a high proportion of skilled personnel will offer more flexible working hours'*.

A greater effect of hypothesis seven is expected in Sweden. In Sweden the offer of work-life policies is more common than in the Netherlands. It is expected that the government offers more support for work-life policies than the Dutch government and companies are more expected by the society to implement family friendly initiatives. To measure the difference between the Dutch and Swedish companies, hypothesis eight is constructed, H8: *'In Sweden companies with a high proportion of skilled personnel will offer more flexible working hours than companies with a high proportion of skilled personnel in the Netherlands.'*

Figure 3 demonstrates that both organizational characteristics 'proportion of female staff' and 'proportion of skilled staff' have a direct influence on the implementation of flexible working hours. Women make more demands for work-life policies and the scarcity and mobility of skilled personnel makes their demands more powerful which makes it more likely that their employers will conform to their demands. Societal attention to work-life policies will influence the values and demands of personnel. More societal attention to work-life policies will lead to more demands for work-life policies from personnel.

Figure 3. Theoretical model: Organisational Adaptation Theory, Neo-institutional and Rational Choice Theory



Evidence and support for this theoretical framework of organizational adaptation can be found in earlier research. Brugelman (1991) used a field experiment to test the extent to which companies are able to develop and adapt themselves in a rational way to the ever changing environment and how they create new strategies to retain their position as a company in the market. In this way, Brugelmann suggests, seen from the perspective of the company, that organizational adaptation of a company can also be seen as a market strategy. From another perspective, Hrebiniak (1985) shows that the interdependence between rational and strategic choice and environmental determinism defines adaptation

Methods

Data and Design

To answer the main question of this thesis, the following survey will be used: *the Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance of 2004/2005* (ESWT). The ESWT of 2004/2005 is the first of these sets which is carried out by Eurofound. Fifteen of the former EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and six of the new EU member states are included (Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, Russia). The survey focuses on working time and work-life balance policies within companies in these countries. Organizations with ten or more employees are included across both sectors, private and public. The survey methodology is built up into two phases. In the first phase, 16.000 workers from the fifteen EU Member States were interviewed over the phone. These telephone interviews were mostly focused on personnel managers and employee representatives. In this survey, only the data of the personnel managers will be used as these data generate the most useful information. The selection procedure of the establishments was random. Subsequent fieldwork started in September 2004 and was coordinated by TNS Infratest Sozialforschung. In the second phase, the other six member states of the EU were included. The telephone interviews were carried out in 4.000 workplaces. This time the fieldwork started in May 2005 and was also coordinated by TNS Infratest Sozialforschung. The interviews were conducted by different institutions, varying per country. In total 21.031 personnel managers were interviewed (Eurofound, 2008).

Measurements

Dependent variables

In this thesis the *offer of flexible working hours* within companies is examined. To measure if and how companies make use of flexible working hour arrangements one dichotomous variable will be used. The possibility for employees to work with flexible time arrangements measured by the question ‘Does your establishment offer employees the possibility to adapt – within certain limits- the time when they begin or finish daily work according to their personal needs or wishes?’. This question can be answered with ‘yes’ (1) or ‘no’ (0). This dichotomous variable has been recoded.

Table 1. Flexible Working Hours (no/yes).

	No (0)	Yes (1)	Missing	Total
Frequency	1166	876	11	2024
Percentages	57,6	41,8	0,5	100

Independent variables

The first reconstructed dependent variable is *public sector*. This variable has been divided into two categories; public and private sector. The categorisation variable is based on information of Den Dulk and Groeneveld (2010). Public sector contains the administrative sector, health, social work and education. Any other type, such as state owned transport and energy, can be assigned to the private sector. The categories in this variable are 'public sector' 'non-public sector' and as well as the dependent variable, this is also a dichotomous one, which has been recoded into 'public sector' (1) and 'non-public sector' (0).

Table 2. Public Sector (no/yes).

	No (0)	Yes (1)	Missing	Total
Frequency	1311	701	12	2024
Percentages	64,8	34,6	0,6	100

Size is the second organisational characteristic and independent variable which is expected to be influential on the offer of flexible working hours within companies. This variable is measured by the question 'How many employees does this company have in total?' whereby all local establishments are included. The size of a company can be declared as one of six response categories. Response categories range from '10 to 19 employees', '20 to 49 employees', '50 to 199 employees', '200 to 499 employees' to '500 or more employees'. To add this variable to the analysis it has been recoded into class midpoints. The new categories are presented in the table below. There are no missings for this variable.

Table 3 Size: number of employees (class midpoints)

	14,5	34,5	74,5	124,5	174,5	224,5	274,5	349,5	449,5	549,5	Total
Frequency	414	570	389	143	72	76	44	102	55	159	2024
Percentages	20,5	28,2	19,2	7,1	3,6	3,8	2,2	5,0	2,7	7,9	100

For the category '500 to more employees' a class midpoint of 549,5 is selected. However this is an approximation for this category and could cause some problems, because there is no knowledge of whether some companies perhaps have a thousand employees. With more detailed information a more specific measurement could be given. Unfortunately this is not

the case so a midpoint is selected one class width away from the most adjacent midpoint (SCP, 2012). To measure whether or not this variable can be used as a continuous variable a skewness and kurtosis test will be done further in this section of this thesis.

Table 4. Proportion of female employees in company (class midpoints)

	0	9,5	29,5	49,5	69,5	89,5	100	Missing	Total
Frequency	62	685	357	356	262	254	37	99,5	2013
Percentages	3,1	33,8	17,6	17,6	12,9	12,5	1,8	0,5	100

The proportion of female employees is another important element which is used as an independent variable. This element is measured by a basic question where the interviewee is asked to estimate the proportion of their employees which is female. Seven categories have been made. Every category contains twenty percent of the whole, starting from a first category of ‘no women at all’ and ending with a category of ‘only women’.

Table 5. Proportion of skilled workers in company (class midpoint)

	0	9,5	29,5	49,5	69,5	89,5	100	Missing	Total
Frequency	96	263	213	184	246	552	437	33	1991
Percentages	4,7	13,0	10,5	9,1	12,2	27,3	21,6	1,6	100

Last, but not least, the proportion of skilled workers will be used as an independent variable. The proportion of their employees which work in skilled jobs should be estimated. Skilled jobs are defined as jobs which require an apprenticeship, a university degree or any other specific professional training. The response categories are divided the same way as with the proportion of female workers. Starting from a category with ‘no skilled workers at all’, the categories are divided into parts of 20% of the whole, the last category is one with ‘only skilled workers’.

To test whether the independent variables differ between Sweden and the Netherlands all the independent variables were converted to a interaction effect with the indirect variable *country*, because in this thesis only these two variables are being investigated only Sweden and the Netherlands are derived from the other twenty-one countries in the data-set. This variable is recoded into ‘The Netherlands’ (0) and ‘Sweden’ (1).

To examine the hypotheses of this thesis rather than a normal multiple regression, a logistic regression needs to be used, because the dependent variable (the offer of flexible working hours) is a dichotomous one (Field, 2005).

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables (NL)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Missing
Offer of flexible working hours	0,47	0,50	0	1	1000	8
Number of employees	3,63	2,65	14,5	549.5	1008	0
Proportion skilled workers	4,15	1,79	0	100	993	15
Proportion female staff	2,24	1,47	0	100	1001	7
Public sector	0,36	0,48	0	1	100	8

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables (SE)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Missing
Offer of flexible working hours	0,68	0,47	0	1	1013	3
Number of employees	3,61	2,90	14,5	549.5	1016	0
Proportion skilled workers	3,50	1,95	0	100	998	18
Proportion female staff	2,73	1,56	0	100	1012	4
Public sector	0,34	0,47	0	1	1012	4

In the tables seven and eight the descriptive statistics are represented of the dependent and independent variables in Sweden and the Netherlands. In Sweden the total offer of flexible working hours by companies is on average larger than the offer of flexible working hours by Dutch companies. In the Netherlands the offering of flexible working hours is less than half of the companies (0,47) while in Sweden this is more than half of the companies in the survey (0,68). The number of employees in both countries are almost the same and vary between 74,5 and 124,5 employees. The standard deviations vary also around the same values. For Sweden the standard deviation is 2,90 and for Netherlands 2,65. In the Netherlands there are on average more skilled workers than in Sweden. Dutch companies 41,5% skilled workers, while Sweden companies have 35,0% of skilled workers. In Sweden the average proportion of female staff is larger than in the Netherlands. Swedish companies have 27,3% of female workers and Dutch companies have 22,4% of female workers. The amount of companies in the public sector are in both countries almost the same. 34% of the companies in the Netherlands are in the public sector and 36% of the companies in Sweden are in the public sector.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables (Total).

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Missing
Offer of flexible working hours	0,58	0,49	0	1	2013	11
Number of employees	3,62	2,78	14,5	549.5	2024	0
Proportion skilled workers	3,82	1,90	0	100	1991	33
Proportion female staff	2,49	1,53	0	100	2012	11
Public sector	0,35	0,48	0	1	2024	12

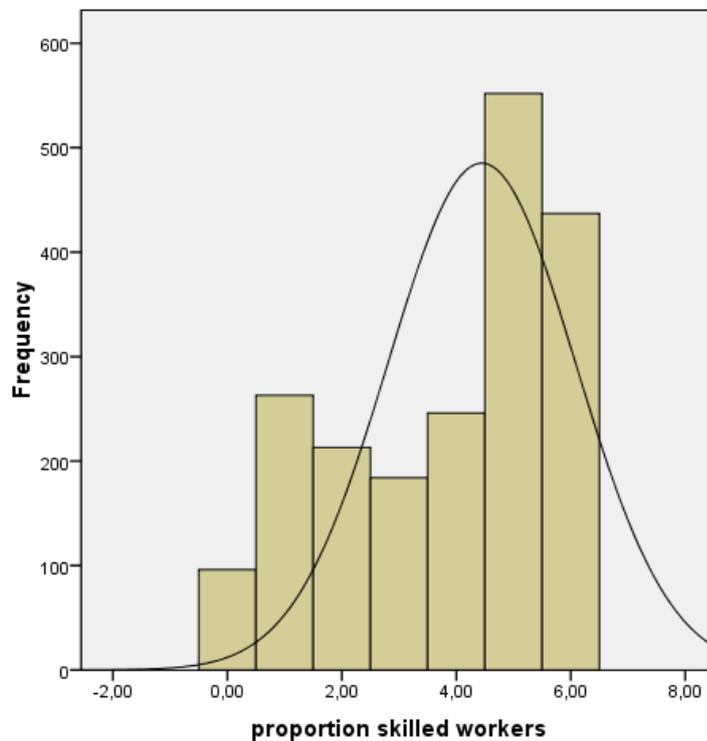
Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics of Sweden and the Netherlands together. Both the independent and the dependent variables are included. This table shows that almost 60% of the companies in Sweden and the Netherlands offer flexible working hours. This percentage has a standard deviation of 0.49. The average number of employees is 2.62, which means that companies in Sweden and the Netherlands hold an average between the second and third category, between 20 to 100 employees. The mean of the proportion of skilled workers is 3.82. Apparently companies have an average of 40 to 60% of skilled workers. Approximately half of the employees have an education; the proportion of female staff is lower. In Sweden and the Netherlands the mean is 2.49 20 to 40% of the staff is female. A small percentage of the companies in Sweden and the Netherlands operate in the public sector, 35%. This mean has a rather small standard deviation. The missings per variable are not that excessively. For public sector for example are no missings. The low rate of missings make the external validity higher for this sample.

For conducting a regression analysis the total *N* should be equal. Therefore every missing scores in each variable will be excluded from the analysis. This is done by means of a pairwise missing selection. Dealing with missings is challenging and by choosing for this particular option makes sure other risks are left out. Another option could be to replace each missing value with the average score for the variable (Field, 2005). According to Field (2005) this could suppress however the true value of the standard deviation. Especially for small samples with many missing values this is dangerous, because a smaller standard error will lead more easily to significant effects. He also suggests that if a sample is large and the missings small this option is not a serious consideration. In this sample the missings are not that extensive and therefore the use of a pairwise missing selection is chosen. The total missings for the logistic regression model after the exclusion is 63. The total *N* for the model will now be 1961.

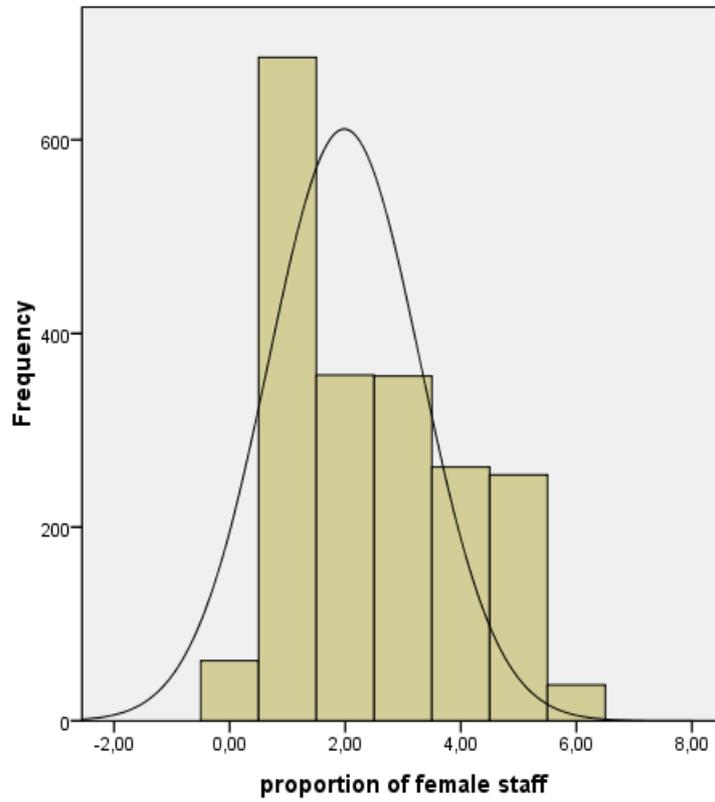
Tests of normality

In order to perform a logistic regression the variables 'proportion of female staff', 'number of employees' and 'proportion skilled workers' are first checked whether they have a normal distribution and if so, they can be used as continuous variable in the logistic regression analysis. To test this a skewness and kurtosis test is done. Table 2 shows the results of this test. These measures tell what the shape of the distribution is. When both are close around zero, the distribution is normal. First to illustrate the possible normal distribution histograms for the three dependent variables are shown below.

Histogram 1. Proportion of skilled workers, normal distribution.



Histogram 2. Proportion of female staff, normal distribution.



Histogram 3. Number of employees, normal distribution.

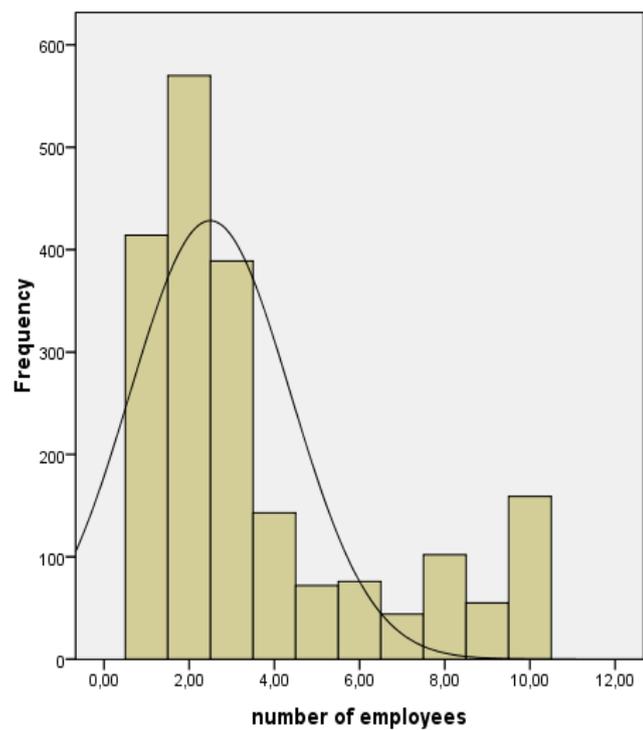


Table 9. Skewness and Kurtosis test

	N	Skewness statistic	Skewness Std. Error	Kurtosis statistic	Kurtosis Std. Error
Proportion of Skilled Workers	1991	-0.530	0.055	-1.048	0.110
Proportion of Female Staff	2013	0.460	0.055	-0.945	0.109
Number of Employees	2024	1.192	0.054	0.163	0.109

By dividing the values by their standard errors some z-scores are computed. This can be done to work out the likelihood of the sample coming from a normally distributed population, the following formulas are used (Allen, 2010):

$$Z_s = \frac{S}{SE_s} \qquad Z_k = \frac{S}{SE_s}$$

For proportion of skilled workers the $Z_s = -9.636$ and the $Z_k = -9.527$. The hypothesis which is that the sample came from a normal distributed population cannot be rejected, so for this variable a normal distribution is assumed for an alpha-level of 0.05. For proportion of female staff the $Z_s = 8.364$ and the $Z_k = -8.670$. For the number of employees the $Z_s = 22.07$ and the $Z_k = 1.495$. Also for these variables a normal distribution can be assumed. Therefore, in the regression model these variables will be used as continuous variables.

Results

Hypotheses testing

By means of a logistic regression in SPSS the next results are generated in table 4. For all tests an alpha-level of 0.05 is used. The total N for both models is 1961.

Let's take a look at hypothesis 1 and 2. Both hypothesis can be confirmed. Large companies implement significantly more flexible working time arrangements than smaller companies with ($B = 0.100$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$). Large companies in Sweden offer significantly more flexible working time arrangements than large companies in the Netherlands ($B = 0.100$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.011$)

Table 10. Logistic Regression Model: Direct effects.

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Number of Employees	,128	,018	49,090	1	,000	1,136
Public Sector	,061	,112	,295	1	,587	1,063
Proportion of Skilled Workers	,099	,025	16,128	1	,000	1,104
Proportion of Female Staff	,083	,034	5,980	1	,014	1,087
Constant (Flexible working hours)	-,739	,138	28,565	1	,000	,478

Table 11. Logistic Regression Model: Direct effects and Interaction effects.

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Number of Employees	.100	.025	16.176	1	.000	1.105
Public Sector	.101	.150	.453	1	.501	1.107
Proportion of Skilled Workers	.120	.034	12.550	1	.000	1.127
Proportion of Female Staff	-.052	.048	1.158	1	.282	.949
Interaction Sweden and Number of Employees	.092	.036	6.533	1	.011	1.097
Interaction Sweden and Public Sector	.094	.234	.161	1	.688	1.099
Interaction Sweden and Proportion Skilled Workers	.075	.040	3.600	1	.058	1.078
Interaction Sweden and Proportion female workers	.160	.063	6.386	1	.012	1.174
Constant (Flexible working hours)	-.890	.144	37.991	1	.000	.411

Hypothesis 3, which assumes that companies in the public sector offer more flexible working time arrangements, is rejected. There is no difference in the amount of offering flexible working hours between companies in the public sector and companies outside the public sector ($B = 0.101$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.282$) This effect doesn't change if the interaction with Sweden is added in hypothesis 4. Swedish companies in the public sector do not offer more or less flexible working hour arrangements than Dutch companies in the public sector ($B=0.094$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.501$).

In hypothesis 5 a high proportion of female staff would cause an increase of the likelihood of implementing flexible working time arrangements by companies; but according to the test this hypothesis cannot be confirmed ($B = -0.052$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.232$). However the interaction effect of Sweden and a high proportion of female workers has effect on the likelihood of implementing flexible working hour arrangements in hypothesis 6 ($B= 0.160$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.012$).

Companies with a high proportion of skilled workers are more likely to offer flexible working hour arrangements for their employees, this effect is significant ($B = 0,120$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$). Hence hypothesis 7 can be confirmed. However the effect of being a Swedish company with a high proportion of skilled workers on the likelihood of implementing flexible working hours is not significant ($B = 0.075$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.058$)

Coefficients of determination

The coefficient of determination is the proportion of variability that is accounted for by a statistical model (Steel, 1960). To determine the fit for the regression models in this thesis the log-likelihood statistic and Nagelkerke's R^2 will be used. To explicate to what extent a model fits the data, observed and predicted values of the outcome are compared. A large log likelihood indicates more observations to be unexplained by the model. In table 12 the coefficients of determination for the conducted logistic regression models are shown.

Table 12. Coefficients of determination

	-2 Log Likelihood	Nagelkerke R square
Logistic Regression Model 1: Direct effects	2584,769	0,059
Logistic Regression Model 2: Direct effects and Interaction effects	2464,401	0,135

The log-likelihood in the first model which includes only the direct effects is higher than in the second regression model. For the first model the log-likelihood is 2584,769, while for the second model it is 2464,401. This means the second regression model is an improving model which fits the data better.

To determine the amount of prediction by a statistical model in linear regression model the R square can also be used. For this model a Nagelkerke's R^2 will be used. The R square for a logistic regression is not the same as it is in a linear regression. This alternative index of a goodness of fit test, like R square, can be seen as a pseudo R square, because for every value in the independent variable heteroscedasticity is assumed instead of homoscedasticity, which is normally the assumption for the R square (Steel, 1960). The Nagelkerke's R^2 can vary between 0 and 1. Zero indicates that the predictors are useless at predicting the outcome variable and a Nagelkerke's R^2 with the value of 1 indicates that the model predicts the outcome variable perfectly (Field, 2005). The total Nagelkerke's R square for the first logistic regression model is 0,059. For the second model the Nagelkerke's R is 0,135. By controlling for country characteristics the model improves in predicting the outcome variable.

Conclusion

In this thesis it has been investigated how organisational characteristics affect the extent to which companies implement flexible working hours and how this differs between Sweden and the Netherlands. The goal of this thesis was to investigate whether in Sweden, with a lot of work-life support, company characteristics have a larger effect on the implementation of flexible working time arrangements than in the Netherlands, with less state work-life support. The organizational characteristics in the research question were company size, female proportion, proportion of skilled workers and public sector. These company characteristics were derived from the neo-institutional-, rational-choice- and organizational adaptation theory.

In order to answer the research question several hypotheses were constructed and tested by means of logistic regression. In the first hypothesis was expected: the larger a company is, the more flexible working hours will be offered by the company. According to the neo-institutional theory the company size affects visibility, companies will try to maintain legitimacy by conforming to normative pressures and therefore implement flexible working hours (Hoffman, 1999). In the logistic regression model this effect was confirmed.

In the theory it was suggested that in Sweden companies experience higher social pressure due to the fact that Sweden has more work-life support than the Netherlands. The second hypothesis which compares Sweden to the Netherlands is also confirmed; large companies in Sweden are more likely to implement flexible working hour arrangements than large companies in the Netherlands. This value of higher social pressure is of importance for both variables 'size' and 'public sector'.

According to the neo-institutional theory organizations in the public sector are just like larger companies considered to be role models (Den Dulk et al., 2010; DiMaggio, 1983). The third hypothesis suggested that companies which operate in the public sector will offer more flexible working hours than companies outside this sector. Hypothesis four suggested that companies in Sweden which operate in the public sector will offer more flexible working hours than companies in the Dutch public sector. Both hypotheses were rejected. Apparently the visibility of a company in the public sector does not directly influence the offer of flexible working time arrangements.

According to the organizational adaptation theory, gender composition of the work force determines the degree of implementation of flexible working arrangements because

female employees demand more work-life policies (Goodstein, 1995; Felstead, 2002). Therefore, hypothesis four suggested that a company with a higher proportion of female staff is more likely to implement flexible working hours. This effect is not significant. In this analysis there is no evidence whether a higher or a lower proportion of female staff influences the implementation of flexible working hour arrangements. Hypothesis five suggested that in Sweden companies with a high proportion of female staff are more likely to implement flexible working hour arrangements than Dutch companies. When the interaction effect is added in the equation, the effect is significant. In Sweden companies with a high proportion of female workers are more likely to implement flexible working time arrangements than companies with a high proportion of female workers in the Netherlands.

The last organizational characteristic which was tested is the proportion of skilled workers. Hypothesis seven expected that a company with a high proportion of skilled workers is more likely to implement flexible working hour arrangements. Employers usually don't want to lose their highly skilled personnel and hence, are more likely to agree to their demands (Felstead, 2002). The hypothesis stated that companies with a high proportion of skilled workers were more likely to implement flexible working hour arrangements. This hypothesis can be confirmed. The last hypothesis, however, can be rejected. This hypothesis stated: In Sweden companies with a high proportion of skilled personnel will offer more flexible working hours than companies with a high proportion of skilled personnel in the Netherlands. No evidence can be found to confirm this hypothesis which states the amount of skilled workers present in a company can influence the offer of flexible working hours within companies. There is also no evidence that this differs between Sweden and the Netherlands.

In this thesis four different organisational characteristics were tested. The research question of this thesis was: *'To what extent does the offer of flexible working hours within companies depend on organizational characteristics and what is the difference between Sweden and the Netherlands?'* The offer of flexible working hours within companies depends on the organisational characteristics company size and the proportion skilled workers. Two important effects between Sweden and the Netherlands have been found in this research. The first effect that will be discussed is the effect between female workers and Sweden. Without the interaction the proportion of female workers doesn't have any effect on flexible working time arrangements. An explanation could be that female workers in Sweden make more use of flexible working hours than Dutch female workers, because

flexible working hours are mostly used by full-time workers. Working hour arrangements are mostly applicable to people who work full-time and men manage their work-life balance especially when they work full-time (Hupkens, 2012). In the Netherlands almost 70 percent of all women in the labour market work part-time, while Swedish women work more fulltime (Cousins, 2004). This could cause the major difference for female proportion between Sweden and the Netherlands. However the data used in this thesis doesn't generate applicable information to control for this effect.

The second effect found in this research is the effect between the size of companies and Sweden. In Sweden the effect of large companies on the offer of flexible working hours is stronger than the effect in the Netherlands. Hence, Swedish companies implement more flexible working hour arrangements, because they conform to a higher perceived social pressure than in the Netherlands. Earlier research suggested that in the Netherlands companies don't offer as much flexible working hour arrangements as in Sweden (Kullander, 2009).

The other two independent variables public sector and skilled workers will now be discussed. The variable public sector could not predict the implementation of flexible working hours in both regression models. This result is quite different than what the theory suggested. Companies in the public sector were suggested to conform more than companies in other sectors to institutional pressure and therefore would implement more flexible working hours to execute their task as role model (DiMaggio, 1983). However no difference has been found between public sector companies and non-public sector companies. To understand why this is not different future research should examine why companies in the public sector do not implement more flexible working hours, because according to theories it is suggested they would do so. However Brugelman (1991) suggested that organisational adaption of a company could be seen as a market strategy. Companies in the public sector enjoy governmental financial support, therefore they don't need a market strategy to make more financial profit. For companies in the public sector using the offer of flexible working hours as a market strategy is in these terms not applicable.

According to the results, a positive relationship between the amount of skilled personnel and the offer of flexible working hours has been found. However, no differences are found in the comparison between Sweden and the Netherlands. There is no stronger effect of skilled personnel in Sweden than in the Netherlands. With the confirmation of the first hypothesis, concerning the variable 'skilled workers' and the rejection of the second

hypothesis it could be stated that the demands of skilled personnel are stronger than the influence of the country context. Flexible working hours are more likely to be implemented through pressure of skilled personnel than through social pressure which influences the way skilled workers demand for flexible working hours.

One of the most important weaknesses of this research is the categorisation of the variables being tested. In the regression model the proportion female workers, the proportion of skilled workers and the company size were categorised by means of class midpoints. This makes the research not as detailed as it can be. In Den Dulk & Groeneveld (2010) the same dataset was used and they used dummies for each category for the variable company size to calculate their hypotheses. However in this research a continuous variable would have been more appropriate. To conduct a regression analysis the use dummy's is not the most preferable option, especially not when using so many variables. This could make the analysis unsystematic, therefore sensitive for wrong interpretations and challenging to make the valid conclusion. By using dummies in a logistic regression, the determining variable will be compared with itself, which diffuses the absolute effect of the complete variable.

Another weakness of this research is that it doesn't examine of which types of governmental work-life policies Dutch and Swedish government make use. Certain governmental projects or policies might help companies to implement flexible working hours and by examining which policies, the difference between Sweden and the Netherlands could be disclosed. However thanks to this thesis the country characteristics were proven to be important for the implementation of flexible working hours. Therefore future research should examine what kind of state support leads to a companies decision to implement flexible working hours.

The strength of this research is that it focuses on one specific type of work-life policy, namely flexible working hour arrangements. As has been said in the introduction several research studies focus on different types of work-life policies at once or just only on flexible working time arrangements in companies and how this interacts with state work-life policies (Den Dulk, 2001; Duvander, 2002; OECD, 2005; Schøne, 2005; Ronsen, 2002).

A second strong point of this research is that it focuses only on Sweden and the Netherlands. Existing theories have been tested in this thesis, however including the context of the countries in the analysis evolves into a better fitting model. The influences of the variables on the offer of flexible working hours are better explained by this model and

can be ascribed to interaction with the country context. This way of analysing and testing has been confirmed by other studies. While other studies focus on several different countries, this thesis particularly focuses on two specific countries with different welfare states, which allows us to go into greater depth (Brewster, 1997; Cousins, 2010; Den Dulk, 2001; Den Dulk, 2007; Kangas, 2007; Klau, 1985). A comparison between Sweden and the Netherlands gives the opportunity to explain differences in the offer of flexible working hours between Sweden and the Netherlands. Knowledge of which type of company characteristics influence the implementation of flexible working hour arrangements could help the Dutch government making adjusted policy. Insights in the activity of specific variables can allow the government to focus on specific organizational characteristics.

To make sure that flexible working time arrangements are more implemented by companies, it can be advised to the Dutch government to focus on the one hand on large companies. Large companies in the Netherlands don't offer the same amount of flexible working as in Sweden, but because of their size they will conform more easily to social pressure, therefore less effort and financial support is needed to stimulate their implementation of flexible working hour arrangements. On the other hand policy in Sweden and the Netherlands can be focussed on smaller companies, because they are less likely to conform to social pressure, therefore more support is needed for smaller companies to introduce flexible working hours.

The second effect which has been found is a positive relation between the proportion of female staff and the offer of flexible working hours. This relationship is stronger in Sweden than in the Netherlands. Based on these results it can be advised to focus state support on companies with a small amount of female employees, those are the companies which offer the least amount of flexible working hours. By supporting flexible working hours in these companies, not only female personnel but also male employees will have the opportunity to utilise flexible working hours. On the contrary, female employees have more demands for flexible working hours than male employees, therefore the government can also be advised to focus on companies with a large amount of female staff and improve the work life balance of female personnel.

The results of this research imply there is a direct connection between large companies and the implementation of flexible working hours. There is also a connection between a high proportion of skilled workers and the implementation of flexible working hours. To policymakers this is quite important, apparently large companies experience social pressure and conform towards it. To stimulate the process of introducing a new sort

of flexible and dynamic work environment, institutional support like ‘The New Working’ week in the Netherlands is needed. This raises as well the attention of the subject as well as the social pressure from the institution. This will make large companies decide to implement flexible working time arrangements for their employees more easily. And the effect will be raised even more when the possibility of flexible working time arrangements are being noticed by skilled workers, because they have more power in a company to demand certain privileges. Companies have to conform to these workers, because of the fear of losing them. Governments and policy makers should anticipate more on these two factors to gain more result in creating a better work-life balance for employees in the labour market.

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