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Flexible Workplace Practices in Small IT Firms: A Multiple Case Study

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Sociology

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**FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE PRACTICES
IN SMALL IT FIRMS:
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY**

(Spine title: Flexible Workplace Practices in Small IT Firms)

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by

Catherine Elizabeth Gordon

Graduate Program in Sociology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
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Abstract

Flexible workplace practices (FWPs), such as flex-time and working from home, facilitate employees' work-life balance or integration and enhance their quality of work. Yet, their use is constrained by time-oriented and gendered workplace cultures. Typically past research involves either a quantitative analysis of individual-level data or a qualitative examination of a single large firm. Meanwhile in Canada, small businesses (with less than 100 employees) employ 48 percent of the total labour force in the private sector (Industry Canada, 2010). In this dissertation, I investigate the FWPs available and used at small information technology (IT) firms. Cross-firm comparisons are made with respect to this flexibility and the working time aspect of workplace culture. I then examine potential individual and structural factors that may influence the availability and use of FWPs, as well as the working time rules and behaviours of small firms. How employees experience FWPs is also explored.

This research is guided by a theoretical orientation that is multi-levelled and multi-directional and incorporates the life course perspective. A multiple case study is utilized here to compare 17 small firms located in the IT industry. Data sources include 103 quantitative web-surveys, 136 in-depth interview transcripts, and 17 case study reports and snapshots, as well as eight human resource (HR) policies that existed among these firms. These data come from a larger project, *Workforce Aging in the New Economy (WANE)*. Findings reveal three patterns among firms regarding their FWPs and working time behaviours and rules. These firms vary along gender, class, and age lines. The small business owners' recent employment transitions and past employment experiences shaped how they ran their firms. Employees' experiences differ accordingly. This

research adds sociological knowledge to literature on FWPs. Findings indicate variation among knowledge-intensive firms regarding the managerial control strategies used and implications for employees. Results also suggest that similar and different processes occur in large and small firms. In order for greater flexibility to be available in small firms, both structural and individual changes need to occur.

Keywords: sociology, flexible workplace practices, alternative work arrangements, employment, workplace cultures, new economy, knowledge-intensive, life course, work-life integration/balance, information technology, case study, small firms

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I have had fortunate research and teaching experiences as a Ph.D. student. As a research assistant for the *WANE* project, I saw different stages of the research process and its complexities. The investigators, researchers, and participants of the *WANE* project made this dissertation possible; without their involvement and hard work, the good quality data would not be available for my use. This project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The *WANE* project gave me resources (i.e., data, equipment, and office space) for my research and introduced me to many ‘aging and work’ researchers including Tammy Duerden Comeau and Emily Jovic. These intelligent women have been an inspiration to me, especially when I started on the project as a Master’s student. I am grateful for the conversations Emily and I shared about our research interests, thoughts about the future, and the hardships and successes she experienced in the dissertation process. I reflected on these conversations when it came time for me to work on my dissertation and was reassured that I was not the only one who faced difficulties.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Workplace flexibility, the topic of this dissertation, has become a prominent issue in scholarly research and mainstream media over the past two decades. The term has become a catchword used by businesses, governments, and academics that is fraught with multiple meanings (Benner, 2002; Hill et al., 2008). From an organizational perspective, flexibility enables companies to respond to the economic transformations that have occurred over the past twenty years. Businesses have increasingly experienced global competition that requires them to innovate continuously and quickly adapt to market demands (Benner, 2002; Carnoy, Castells, & Benner, 1997). Currently, market risks and insecurities are ever-present as organizations and economies are either recovering from or still suffering the effects of the recent recession (2008). Flexible practices that help businesses be competitive involve employment contracts (e.g., hiring temporary workers over permanent workers) and/or labour process activities (e.g., changing the quantity and pace of work required of employees) (Benner, 2002). These practices also require workers to be adaptable (Kalleberg, 2000; Smith, 1997). For instance, workers may be required to respond promptly to emergent problems or issues “after hours” in the evenings or on weekends; technologies (i.e., smart phones, laptops) facilitate this 24/7 work environment (Presser, 2003; Valcour & Hunter, 2005). For businesses, the economic bottom line is the primary concern, and working conditions and job insecurity are only minor concerns (Burchell, Ladipo, & Wilkinson, 2002; Sennett, 1998).

From a worker’s perspective, flexibility has the potential to help individuals and their families overcome the challenges involved in combining their work and personal lives (Christensen & Schneider, 2010; Korabik, Lero, & Whitehead, 2008). The greater

attention given to this kind of flexibility over the past 20 years coincides with the increasing participation of women in the labour force, the commonality of dual-income earner households, and the increasing amount of time men spend performing child care (Marshall, 2006, 2009). These social trends help expose how work is often organized in a way that is incompatible with family life (Corman & Luxton, 2007; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). Working long hours, for example, is frequently an idealized behaviour; but, it presumes that workers have an unlimited amount of time available for work (Rapoport et al., 2002). Flexible practices that primarily benefit workers gives them some choice about where, when, and for how long they perform their work (Hill et al., 2008; Jacob & Gerson, 2004; Korabik et al., 2008; Lewis & Cooper, 2005). This flexibility is the focus of my dissertation; I refer to these practices as flexible workplace practices or FWPs.

1.1 Flexible Workplace Practices (FWPs)

There are three dimensions of flexible workplace practices (FWPs) that are considered in this thesis. The first has to do with the extent to which employers are flexible with regard to alternative work arrangements. Examples include taking leaves of absence and extended breaks during the workday, as well as reducing hours from full-time to part-time, job-sharing, or phased retirement (Hill et al., 2008; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). These work arrangements tend to affect the number of hours worked. The second kind of FWPs considered here involves scheduling when work is performed and the possibility of varying the scheduling of work without changing the total number of hours (Hill et al., 2008; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Kossek & Van Dyne,

2008). Examples include flex-time, variable work days or work-weeks, and compressed work-weeks. Flex-time refers to choosing when to begin and end a workday; it typically has limitations regarding when hours are to be worked (e.g., between 8am and 8pm) and/or what core hours must be worked (e.g., 10am to 4pm) (Akyeampong, 1993; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). Variable work days or weeks mean that employees work more one day or week and less another day or week; these FWP's should not be confused with the irregular shift-work involved in part-time and/or temporary jobs because such variability is decided by managers. A compressed work-week refers to working the equivalent amount of weekly hours but spread over fewer days (e.g., four 10-hour days). The third consideration regards the location of where work is performed (e.g., at home on an occasional or permanent basis).

1.2 Benefits for Individuals

FWPs are a means through which individuals can integrate their work and personal lives in more harmonious ways. Two-thirds of Canadians experience a moderate level of work-life conflict and just less than 30 percent experience a high level of work-life conflict (Duxbury & Higgins, 2003; MacBride-King & Bachmann, 1999). Work-life integration, balance, and conflict are phrases that are commonly used to indicate whether individuals are able to fulfill or “manage effectively multiple responsibilities at work, at home, [and] in their community” (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSDC], 2005). Unintentionally, the phrase ‘work-life’ may imply that work is separate from one’s life, but the term is more recognized and convenient to use than ‘work-personal lives’ (Lewis & Cooper, 2005).

Higher work-life conflict is associated with stress (Kelloway, Gottlieb, & Barham, 1999), poor physical health (Burke & Greenglass, 1999; Grzywacz, 2000), low life satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), and family distress (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005). It is also associated with lower job satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvan, 2005; Netemeyer, Maxham, & Pullig, 2005) and lower organizational commitment (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Netemeyer et al., 2005), as well as higher absenteeism (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Netemeyer et al., 2005), a desire to find new employment (Kelloway et al., 1999; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvan, 2005), and actual turnover (Greenhaus, Collins, Singh, & Parasuraman, 1997).

Research consistently finds that the use of FWPs is associated with lower work-life conflict, stress, and anxiety (Christensen & Staines, 1990; Glass & Estes, 1997; Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2008; Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001). As a result, one's health is also enhanced (Fenwick & Tausig, 2004; Galinsky et al., 2010). Using FWPs is also associated with greater job satisfaction (Christensen & Staines, 1990; Comfort, Johnson, & Wallace, 2003) and the retention of employees who may have exited the labour force otherwise (Glass & Riley, 1998; Rodgers, 1992). Access to FWPs is also found to have positive effects on individuals' job satisfaction and health, and decrease the likelihood they seek out a different job (Galinsky, Sakai, & Wigton, 2010). In short, individuals who experience low work-life conflict are happier and healthier people and the use of FWPs facilitates such a state.

1.3 Benefits for Businesses

The business case for why organizations should facilitate the development and use of FWPs largely rests on the benefits derived from employees reducing their work-life conflict and stress. Employees who experience low work-life conflict have greater organizational commitment and motivation to do their jobs well (Osterman, 1995) and are more productive (Konrad & Mangel, 2000; Rodgers, 1992) compared to employees who experience higher work-life conflict. These employee qualities are presumed to benefit businesses because employees are focused, committed, and happy.

Some argue, however, that employee qualities, such as happiness, do not serve businesses' immediate needs for profitability in the marketplace leaving managers wondering how FWPs add to the bottom line. Their concerns are addressed through the idea of mutual flexibility, a reciprocal exchange between employees and employers that enables both parties to fulfill their immediate needs (Gonyea & Googins, 1996; Harker, 1996). Mutual flexibility requires employees and employers to recognize each others' needs and know the differences between them. When these needs conflict, trade-offs should be made (Gonyea & Googins, 1996). For instance, employees will go beyond their typical work duties or hours of work when needed to by their employer in exchange for using FWPs (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Gonyea & Googins, 1996). Through this exchange, employers receive more direct benefits compared to situations in which FWPs are available only as entitlements (Atkinson & Hall, 2009). Notably, however, power imbalances between employers and employees are bound to influence employment relationships and may hinder mutual flexibility; employees may be taken advantage of if

they give more to employers than what they receive in return (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Gonyea & Googins, 1996).

1.4 Benefits for Society

Implementation of FWPs in the workplace also benefits society as a whole. These practices potentially help businesses align with demographic and social trends and contribute towards gender equity in the workplace. The great range of FWPs involving when, where, or for how long work is performed can accommodate a variety of preferences and needs.

Gender equity in the workplace means that opportunities and constraints are distributed equally for men and women (Perrons, Fagan, McDowell, Ray, & Ward, 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002). It respects the different preferences, circumstances, and needs among both men and women (Perrons et al., 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002). Any movement towards gender equity through FWPs requires that such practices are supported by employees' immediate supervisors and the workplace culture of a company. Otherwise, the use of FWPs is limited (see Bailyn, 2006; Bond, 2004; Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Peper, den Dulk, & van Doorne-Huiskes, 2009) and the gendered connotation that FWPs are only for mothers will persist (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Peper et al., 2009).

Recognition of diversity not only facilitates gender equity but also reflects the current portrait of Canadian families. Eighty-four percent of Canadians live with immediate family members (spouse or partner, children, and/or parents) (Milan, Vézina, Wells, 2007).¹ Among these families, 16 percent are lone-parent, 43 percent are couples (married or common-law) who do not have children under the age of 25 living in the

¹ Data are from the 2006 *Census*.

home, and 41 percent are couples who have children 24 years and under living in the home.² FWPs enable parents to drop off and/or pick-up their children from daycare or school, take them to appointments, and stay home when they are sick or home from school, among other things. Parents, however, are not the only potential beneficiaries of FWPs. The remaining 16 percent of Canadians who do not live with family members and the couples who are childless may need to use FWPs in order to fulfill their personal (e.g., educational training), caregiving (e.g., care for or help a parent), or community responsibilities (e.g., coach of minor sports) and work activities with ease. In short, it is important to recognize that Canadian employees have varying responsibilities, circumstances, and needs.

In addition to the diversity briefly described above, changes have occurred among husband and wife couples who are either legally married or common-law. The prevalence of dual-income earners among these couples has risen from 36 percent in 1976 to 69 percent in 2006 (Marshall, 2006).³ Further, the likelihood that both partners work full-time (30 or more hours per week) has increased over the past 10 years (Marshall, 2009).⁴ This change is largely because fewer wives work part-time (from 26 percent in 1997 to 21 percent in 2008, $p < .05$). Another change within these couples is that men are becoming more involved in parental care, although women are more likely to be the primary caretakers (Marshall, 2006). These trends highlight the pressing concern of

² Among the 84 percent of Canadians who live with family members, 69 percent are married couples and 16 percent are common-law couples.

³ Data are from the 2005 *General Social Survey* (GSS).

⁴ Differences are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Data are from the *Labour Force Survey* (LFS), 1997 and 2008.

work-life conflict, particularly if young children live at home, as fewer couples have a partner at home on a part-time or full-time basis (Marshall, 2009).⁵

Workplaces that do not acknowledge employees' non-working lives (e.g., through FWP) presume work-life conflict is an individual's problem. Using Mills' (1959) terminology, this issue is a 'private trouble' that is often shouldered by women considering the inequitable division of caregiving responsibilities (Luxton & Corman, 2001; Marshall, 2006). Mills (1959) argues that private troubles should also be considered beyond an individual level as a 'public issue' in order for resolution. Treating work-life conflict as a public issue requires institutions (i.e., workplaces) to take some responsibility for the problem or issue; helping employees overcome their personal challenges with FWPs, for example, may not eradicate work-life conflict as a social phenomenon but will provide some alleviation. These supports may also improve women's status because they might serve to enhance the value that society places on family and domestic labour. This possibility is based on the reasoning that the devaluation of family and domestic labour contributes to gender inequality and the private troubles of work-life conflict (see Corman & Luxton, 2007; Luxton & Corman, 2001).

Another matter to consider in discussions of FWPs is population aging. Population aging has garnered attention in the work-life literature regarding the looming elder care that employees are expected to provide for their Baby Boomer parents (individuals born between 1946 and 1966) (see Galinsky, 2001; Higgins et al., 2008; Lero & Lewis, 2008). Population aging also implies that the needs of the labour force will change as it becomes older and workplaces will need to adapt in order to retain older

⁵ Data are from the 2005 *General Social Survey* (GSS).

workers and high levels of productivity. In 2006, the oldest Boomers turned 60. Record levels of labour force participation of older workers were set that year, as 59 percent of those aged 55 to 64 participated in the labour force (Marshall & Ferrao, 2007); 45 percent of those aged 60 to 64 participated in the labour force.⁶ Although the majority of these older workers aged 55 to 64 years work full-time (81 percent), they are more likely to work reduced hours compared to their core-aged counterparts aged 25-54 years (Marshall & Ferrao, 2007). Other research indicates that workers over the age of 65 who work reduced hours are highly satisfied with their jobs (Haider & Loughran, 2010). As more Boomers become older workers (aged 55 years and older), there may be an increase in the need or desire for phased retirement or related FWPs that involve reduced hours, either weekly, monthly, or annually.

1.5 This Dissertation

Work-life research tends to analyze phenomena at the individual level (Brandth & Kvande, 2002; Kossek & Lambert, 2005; Kossek & Friede, 2006; Lero & Lewis, 2008). Consequently, organizational structures and processes receive scant attention. Studies on workplace culture are exceptions; they generally show that whether a workplace culture (or immediate supervisor) is supportive of FWPs influences an employee's experience of work-life conflict (see Andreassi & Thompson, 2008; Bailyn, 2006; Bond, 2004; Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). Scholars suggest that additional research is needed on the obstacles to and opportunities for FWPs in workplaces (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004) and how decisions are made about these practices (Zeytinoglu, Cooke, & Martin, 2009). This dissertation addresses these concerns by

⁶ Data are from the *Labour Force Survey* (LFS) 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, and 2006.

examining small firms' FWPs in relation to the context of the firm and then making comparisons with the findings from other small firms. Notably, the firms studied in this dissertation are located in Ontario and Alberta. In Appendix A, I review regulations regarding hours of work and leaves of work in the Ontario's Employment Standard Act (ESA) and Alberta's Employment Standard Code (Code). The policy context in which a firm operates may influence the firm's Human Resource (HR) policies and practices.

Examining organizations will help us to better understand work-life issues as public issues (Mills, 1959). The focus is on small firms because little is known about their FWPs (Lero & Lewis, 2008; MacDermid, Williams, Marks, & Heilbrun, 1994; Pitt-Catsouphes & Litchfield, 2001). This gap is a concern in Canada because small businesses (with less than 100 employees) employ 48 percent of the total labour force in the private sector (Industry Canada, 2010).⁷ Additionally, small firms are not legally required to give employees sick days for personal or family purposes (see Appendix A). There is a tendency in the literature to assume that the same processes occur in small and large firms with regard to the implementation and utilization of FWPs. Yet, equating small firms with larger firms may understate their differences.

In the following chapter, theoretical perspectives and concepts are reviewed to explain access to and use of FWPs. This overview highlights their strengths and weaknesses. A conceptual framework is developed in this chapter that is used in this dissertation. The research questions that arise from this framework are also presented.

Chapter 3 provides the details of the methods used in this dissertation. The sample and data used are drawn from the *Workforce Aging in the New Economy* (WANE) project. The sources of quantitative and qualitative data enable a multiple case study

⁷ Data are from the *Survey of Employment, Payrolls and Hours* (SEPH), April 2010.

approach whereby each firm in the study is considered a case. The limitations of the analyses of this thesis are also discussed in this chapter.

The next three chapters are empirical. In Chapter 4, I use multiple sources of data to facilitate a holistic understanding of a firm's FWPs. The small firms are classified in relation to their FWPs. "Rigid firms" and "Flexible firms" are two types of firms that emerge. Also in this chapter, the working time aspect of a workplace culture is compared across firms. A typology emerges from this chapter that is used in the subsequent two chapters.

Chapter 5 identifies potential sources of a firm's FWPs that have received limited attention. This chapter includes two analyses both of which draw heavily on the life course concepts of this dissertation's conceptual framework. First, the lives of small business owners are examined in relation to their firm's FWPs. I argue that the employment patterns and experiences of the small firm owners influence how they developed FWPs at their respective firms. A select number of cases that were family-owned are further examined in the second part of Chapter 5. I show that these family-owned small firms vary in their FWPs partly because of the family members' linked lives. The context in which these lives are lived is also discussed throughout this chapter.

Organizational processes influencing FWPs in firms are reviewed in Chapter 6. Employees' experiences of FWPs in small firms are subsequently examined in relation to these processes. I show how employees' experiences varied by the firm's relative position in the typology developed in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 also addresses whether good working environments result from FWPs offered formally or informally.

In Chapter 7, I summarize the study findings and then discuss their contributions to the literature. This study's limitations and new insights for future research are also considered.

Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Framework

In Chapter 1, flexible workplace practices (FWPs) were discussed in relation to how they benefit individuals, firms, and society but it was also suggested that such policies and practices are not widely used by employees. This chapter attempts to explain this two-fold phenomenon. Some employees may not have access to FWPs and other employees may not be able to use available FWPs. Recall from the previous chapter that FWPs inherently involve giving workers some choice over where, when, and for how long they perform their work (Hill et al., 2008; Lewis & Cooper, 2005). In sociology, there is a large body of literature that attempts to explain control in the workplace. I draw on this theoretical literature, as well as related work-life scholarship, in my dissertation. Although flexibility for employees is a topic in the business/management and organizational psychology fields, the focus here is in strengthening sociological-based understandings of the access to and use of FWPs.

I discuss theoretical perspectives in relation to what they explain and what they do not adequately address. A general critique of these theories is that they tend to focus on an individual, a workplace, or a structural level in their explanations, rather than integrating all of these levels of analysis. These gaps are addressed in a conceptual framework that is put forward and that is the basis for the theoretical perspective guiding this dissertation. This chapter ends with a presentation of this conceptual framework and the research questions that arise from it.

2.1 Stratification Perspective

Lambert and colleagues (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert & Waxman, 2005) favour a stratification perspective to explain differences in access to FWP. Consistently, research finds that workers who are most likely to have access to FWPs are professional men who work in service sectors not related to construction, transportation, education, or health industries (Comfort et al., 2003; Ferrer & Gagné, 2006; Gerson & Jacobs, 2001; Golden, 2009; Higgins et al., 2008; Hyman, Scholarios, & Baldry, 2005; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005; Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). Many employees do not have a choice about whether to use FWPs because such practices are not available to them. The stratification perspective explains these differences by pointing to the relative opportunities that are often available to those in privileged labour market positions (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert & Waxman, 2005).

The stratification perspective suggests that occupations and jobs are stratified or arranged hierarchically so that some are considered “good” and others are “bad” (Duffy, Glenday, & Pupo, 1997; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert & Waxman, 2005; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). Good jobs tend to involve greater power, autonomy, and wealth than do bad jobs. The greater wealth that good jobs offer refers not only to incomes but also to employment benefits, such as dental insurance, supplementary health insurance, pension plans, and FWPs. Examples of good jobs include accountants, engineers, and lawyers and examples of bad jobs include insurance agents, production operators, and retail sales clerks. The unequal distribution of rewards and wealth in the labour market affects certain groups of individuals differently (Duffy et al., 1997; Lowe

& Schellenberg, 2001). Generally speaking, individuals who are women, of visible minority, not Canadian-born, younger and older tend to hold bad jobs (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Creese, 2007; Duncan, 2003; O’Rand & Henretta, 1999; Pendakur, 2000; Reskin & Roos, 1990). Access to good jobs and their advantages is not equal for all individuals.

Mapping out distributive inequalities helps sort out who does and does not have access to good jobs and who, as a result, is more likely to have access to FWPs. It does not, however, inform us about why individuals with access to FWPs do not use them. The most privileged employees (professionals) do not necessarily have the power to choose their own work arrangements or conditions based on their own needs (Higgins et al., 2008; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Research finds that workplace barriers to FWPs cut across occupations (Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009). Power relations and potential conflict between managers and employees are not explicitly considered in Lambert and colleagues’ stratification approach (Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004; Lambert & Waxman, 2005). The omission of conflict reflects a central criticism of the stratification approach in general; that it is consensus-based (see Grabb, 2002). This perspective also does explain why firms may vary in their availability of FWPs to employees, an issue addressed by institutional theory.

2.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, which emerged from organizational studies and sociology, is used by work-life scholars to explain the motivations of organizations to formalize FWPs (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Ollier-Malaterre, 2009; Peper et al., 2009). It assumes that social or cultural pressures influence whether institutions, or organizations, adopt certain

HR policies, such as FWPs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Demographic and social trends, such as the rise of dual full-time earners, presented in Chapter 1 may generate increased social pressure for organizations to adopt policies that facilitate the integration of work and personal lives of workers. Such pressure already occurs through the top 100 lists that magazines and newspapers publish about the companies that have the most or best work-life policies like FWPs, for example (see e.g., CNN, 2011). According to institutional theory, the more visible the organization is to the public, the greater scrutiny it receives if FWPs (and other benefits) are not established (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Hutchens & Nolen, 2010; Ollier-Malaterre, 2009; Peper et al., 2009). This presumption partially explains why larger firms are more likely than small firms to offer FWPs through a formal policy (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Ferrer & Gagné, 2006; Kalleberg, Knoke, Marsden, & Spaeth, 1996; Pitt-Catsouphes, & Litchfield, 2001; Swanberg et al., 2005; Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). The reputation of smaller companies is not necessarily tarnished if they do not make the top 100 lists, which larger companies tend to dominate.

According to Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002), an institutional approach also helps explain why formal FWPs are not used by employees. Incorporating FWPs into an organization's HR policy is merely symbolic because they are not necessarily integrated into the workplace's structure. The new policies may conflict with existing workplace practices regarding where, when, and for how long workers perform the work that managers (and some workers) value. Consequently, the new policies may not be supported. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) suggest that in order for FWPs to be integrated into an organization, those (e.g., senior employees, managers) with relatively more power

compared to others need to support their use. Workplace culture and managerial beliefs about how work should be performed also need to change in ways that do not challenge FWP (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Peper et al., 2009). Managerial control and workplace culture have been widely theorized in sociology; I review some of these perspectives in the subsequent sections.

2.3 Managerial Control Perspectives

The FWPs studied in this thesis involve alternative work arrangements (e.g., reduced hours of work, taking time off during the day), as well as changing the timing and place of when work is performed (Hill et al., 2008; Korabik et al., 2008; Lewis & Cooper, 2005). They give employed individuals, including workers and supervisors, some choice regarding how they work. This definition implies that workers possess some control in the workplace if FWPs are available or used (Hill et al., 2008). Indeed, research consistently finds that lacking control over one's job is a barrier to utilizing FWPs (Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Fenwich & Tausig, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Peper et al., 2009).

Job control refers to having autonomy over various aspects of one's working conditions, such as job tasks and the scheduling of work. According to work-life scholars, workers can gain greater job control if they challenge constraining workplace practices about how work should be performed (e.g., working from at least 9am to 5pm) and how workers should be managed and push for new workplace practices that involve trust. The premise here is that workers will perform their work but because one's work and personal lives are inextricably linked, flexibility is required (Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton,

2002; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Cooper, 2005; Rapoport et al., 2002). These scholars focus on gendered relations in connection with employees' control in the workplace, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Class relations that characterize the power relations between managers and employees, however, receive insufficient attention in work-life research. Here, I review particular sociological theories of work that address workers' lack of control in the workplace. I begin with a brief overview of how Marx (1961) theorized the relationship between owners and workers in capitalism and then discuss how Friedman (1977), Burawoy (1979), and Edwards (1979) build upon Marx's work. The contributory works of contemporary scholars who follow these traditions are also discussed.

2.3.1 Marx: Surplus Value, Exploitation, and Alienation

Marx (1961) argues that money in and of itself has no value. It obtains value from what it is exchanged for, from capital. Hence, capitalists who are the owners of the means of production aim to accumulate capital (Marx, 1961). Capital is obtained when a produced commodity is consumed. Capital is also a function of surplus value. Surplus value is derived from the labour performed beyond workers' necessary labour; the point at which wages and the use-value of the product produced is equal. Workers participate in an exchange of labour for wages in order to cover the subsistence costs of themselves and their families; these costs refer to the expenses required for survival such as food and shelter. Typically, their wages are much less than the value of their total labour performed. This imbalance leads Marx (1961) to consider the relationship between owners and workers as exploitative.

According to Marx (1961), the power difference between owners and workers also results in alienation. Workers are alienated in five ways. They are alienated from the product that they produced (which is owned by the capitalist), the labour process (their work activities), their self-development and expression, their own essence (human creativity), and relationships with others at work. Of particular interest here is alienation from the labour process. Workers with no or limited control over the labour process cannot choose when, where, and/or for how long their work is performed. Hence, this lack of control is an underlying issue in the study of FWPs (Fenwich & Tausig, 2004; Hill et al., 2008).

Marx (1961) suggested that capitalists have an interest in controlling workers' behaviours in order to avoid disruptions in the labour process and consequently, the accumulation of capital; the accumulation of capital is the primary concern of capitalists but not workers. According to Marx, workers will consent to alienation and exploitation because they are paid enough to live but not enough to stop working indefinitely. This argument explains why individuals need to work in the context of capitalism but does less to explain why workers endure alienating and exploitive workplace conditions.

Friedman (1977), Burawoy (1979), and Edwards (1979) adapted Marx's arguments about industrial capitalism to the context of monopolistic capitalism. Monopoly capitalism is seemingly less despotic but involves a greater centralization and concentration of capital compared to industrial capitalism (Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977). Companies extend their operations by performing additional stages of operation for materials and services that they previously purchased from suppliers, wholesalers, and retailers (centralization). Companies also merge or are

acquired (concentration). Other changes include capitalists' reliance on managers to carry out their own interests and intensification of the labour process (e.g., shortened time required to finish work tasks) in order to maximize the surplus value for capitalists (Burawoy, 1979). Below, I review the theories of Friedman (1977), Burawoy (1979), and Edwards (1979) that explain how control over workers' behaviours is maintained in the context of monopoly capitalism. I relate their respective perspectives to contemporary theoretical perspectives. Critiques of their approaches are discussed together at the end of this section.

2.3.2 Direct Control and Responsible Autonomy

Friedman (1977) builds upon Marx's work by theorizing about different kinds of control strategies managers needed as a result of changes to the labour process and/or worker resistance in the context of monopolistic capitalism. According to Friedman (1977, 2000), managers exercise their authority over workers through strategies of direct control or responsible autonomy. Together, these strategies constitute a rough continuum of direct and indirect managerial control (Friedman, 2000). Both strategies have been found throughout capitalism's history (Friedman, 1977). Responsible autonomy strategies are typically used to manage privileged white-collared workers (i.e., middle managers, professionals, clerks), whereas direct control strategies are primarily used to manage workers in low or no-skilled jobs.

Direct control involves close supervision, coercive threats, and minimal responsibility of workers (Friedman, 1977). A scientific approach reflects a direct control strategy because the labour process is fragmented in ways that result in routine tasks and

involves little-to-no skill (see Braverman, 1974; Taylor, 1947). In the context of monopoly capitalism, firms were growing in size and complexity. According to Friedman (1977), scientific management approaches enabled firms to improve their productivity and competitiveness in the market. Over time, however, workers became increasingly dissatisfied with being treated like machines and resisted in an organized manner, making them difficult to replace. Although capitalism was not overthrown, managers responded to the resistance by shifting away from direct control strategies to responsible autonomy strategies.

Responsible autonomy is an indirect way to control workers and their labour (Friedman, 1977, 2000). According to Friedman, it requires managers to give workers some freedom in how they perform their work tasks and makes managers reliant on their “goodwill” to work in productive ways. The contrasting class interests of workers and owners motivate managers to align workers’ interests to the firm’s goals. In order to facilitate a goodwill that contributes to firms’ productiveness and competitiveness, managers give workers higher statuses and greater authority and responsibilities compared to their previous circumstances and to other workers. In the past, this strategy was abandoned when owners or top managers decided that managers needed greater control over the day-to-day work activities of workers in order to respond to changes in demand in the market (Friedman, 1977).

Direct control and responsible autonomy are useful concepts to explain managerial control and can be used in relation to the study of FWPs. Whether workers can use FWPs depends on their relative control over their work and the strategies managers use to control them (Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Fenwich &

Tausig, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Peper et al., 2009). As discussed earlier in this chapter, workers stratified in relatively privileged or better jobs, such as professionals and managers, tend to have access to FWPs compared to workers stratified in lower-levelled jobs, such as part-time retail workers (see e.g., Higgins et al., 2008; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004). Privileged workers' relative advantage to access FWPs and greater control over work tasks may be a function of responsible autonomy.

Friedman warns that responsible autonomy is flawed because it emphasizes workers' autonomy while obscuring the lack of control workers actually have over the labour process. This contradiction may become evident when workers begin to expect firms to be responsive to their needs (Friedman, 1977, 2000). If workers' needs oppose the owners' interests in increasing profits, accommodations will not be made.

Accordingly, workers may lose their goodwill and disrupt the labour process or leave the firm. Managers then may need to change their managerial control strategies once again.

MacEachen and colleagues (MacEachen, Polzer, & Clarke, 2008) illustrate this contradiction in their examination of managers' discourse of flexibility in computer software firms. MacEachen and colleagues find that although managers speak of flexibility for employees (FWPs) favourably, greater flexibility is required by workers to the firm than the flexibility given to workers. In these workplaces, workers had the autonomy to work when and where they wanted but had to finish their work, which required long hours. Firms largely benefit from this practice of responsible autonomy. Personal and work time and space became merged or blurred for workers, and as a result, "all time is potential work time" (MacEachen et al., 2008: 1028). If workers demanded

FWPs that involved a reduction in hours of work, problems would likely arise because the bottom-line may be affected.

Responsible autonomy is typically the way to manage workers in knowledge-intensive firms in the new economy (Frenkel, Korczynski, Donoghue, & Shire, 1995; MacEachen et al., 2008). This strategy is described as the most effective way to “coordinate and cultivate” (Malone, 2004) highly skilled knowledge workers (Damarin, 2006; Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, & Swan, 2002). Managers are to set the goals and objectives for workers and to facilitate their creativity and knowledge work through favourable workplace conditions (Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). For instance, better wages, monetary benefits, and the lack of rules about how to work are touted as strategies to keep workers motivated and be committed to the goals of the firms (Frenkel et al., 1995; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002); they are also a means to retain skilled and knowledgeable workers. But the urgency to come up with new ideas and the precariousness of knowledge-intensive firms in the market results in managerial control over the working and personal lives of workers (MacEachen et al., 2008).

2.3.3 Gaining Workers' Consent by Playing Games

In the context of an intensified labour process, Burawoy (1979) questions why workers are exerting greater effort over their work activities instead of disrupting the labour process. According to him, Marx's explanation based on workers' economic dependence on capitalists and the prevalent Marxist presumption at the time that workers were simply objects of manipulation were both inadequate because they did not address

workers' consent. Burawoy argues that some form of consent is required for workers' co-operation.

Burawoy (1979) uses the metaphor of a game to represent the mechanisms employed by managers to gain the consent of workers. This representation goes beyond the means-to-an-end conception involved in the scientific management approach which focuses on how the labour process is broken up into standardized tasks (see e.g., Braverman, 1974; Taylor, 1947). A game metaphor allows Burawoy to tease out the informal activities and interpersonal relations involved in the labour process. Managers establish specific rules and goals for the game that facilitate the accumulation of capital through increased surplus value. In order to attract workers to participate in the game and adopt the goals as their own, they are given incentives or rewards for reaching certain performance levels. Workers are also given some autonomy whereby they choose whether to play and how to perform.

Burawoy (1979) finds support for this game metaphor in his research on a manufacturing company. He refers to the game used at this company as "making out" and claims it advanced from the piece-rate system. In the piece-rate system, benchmarks of production within a timeframe (e.g., 100 pieces in an hour) were specified for each worker. When excess output was produced, workers were rewarded through bonuses, bragging rights, and/or having a reputation of being a good worker. Bargaining with managers on an individual basis abated over time and negotiations began to occur in the conference room. The piece-rate system transitioned to become a making-out game (Burawoy, 1979).

Recall that Marx (1961) identified increasing workers' surplus labour as an interest of owners of production but not of workers. According to Burawoy (1979), games obscure and secure workers' surplus labour. Surplus labour is obscured through minimizing hierarchical conflict between managers and workers in two ways. The first and most effective way is to redistribute hierarchical conflict laterally. Competing against each other as individuals or as teams, who vie to be the best and win the game, generates new tensions among workers. This competition may also pressure workers to participate in the game with their team. Burawoy suggests that a workplace culture emerges from a game because workers pursue common values, which are the goals of the game. A second obscuring technique is to distract workers with the technology used to complete their work activities. Workers may be alienated from their co-workers in the labour process because they do not perform their work tasks alongside each other. But, workers do have direct relationships with the machines they use to generate output. Together, the relationship with technology and playing the game as individuals and teams and not as a group of workers collectively, obscures surplus labour because workers are unaware or unconcerned with any lack of control over the labour process.

A game also secures surplus labour by generating consent. Playing the game implies that workers accept the rules, such as target outputs, that management established (Burawoy, 1979). According to Burawoy, workers cannot play the game and question the rules of it at the same time. Playing presents the rules as natural, but the game has a set of goals that correspond to the particular interests of managers and employers. The desired levels of production, for example, are within acceptable profit margins for the employer. Consequently, playing the game legitimizes the power relations involved in the labour

process. Although the games Burawoy described were manufacturing-based, his metaphor also helps us understand how workers' behaviours are controlled in service-based or combined services and manufacturing companies. Stewart (2004) and Sharone (2004) both use the game metaphor to better understand why workers adhere to the time pressures they experience in contemporary workplaces. Such time pressures may counter FWPs and inhibit their use.

Stewart (2004) examined time pressures in the urban bicycle messenger industry. Messengers are pressured to deliver packages in a fast manner in order to increase the number of packages that can be delivered in a shift. Being fast enhances one's reputation among employers and colleagues. Valued skills of this game include riding without braking, figuring out optimal routes, and participating in messenger alley races. There is a requirement to work a certain number of hours continuously during the workday. Although FWPs were not the focus of Stewart's research, one could presume this industry does not widely adopt FWPs and that if policies include them their use would not contribute to having a speedy reputation.

Sharone (2004) studied time pressures in a large technology firm. Here, workers are pressured to work long hours. The minimum and average numbers of hours worked per week were 50 and 67, respectively. The minimal hour requirement was established by managers through a competitive self-management game. The rules of this game entail two time-consuming activities. Workers must perform long hours of work and upgrade their skills on their own time. Participating in this game and following its rules is indicative of workers' professional competence. Managers conduct periodic performance reviews. The performance reviews follow a rigid bell curve that requires at least 70

percent of workers to receive an average or below average score. These rules, or rather goals, of the self-management game seem to contradict or at least serve as barriers to the use of FWPs, which likely take time away from work.

Despite the different rules of Burawoy's (1979) manufacturing game and the service games illustrated by Stewart (2004) and Sharone (2004), the results are similar. These games are a vehicle to control a workforce. Attention is diverted away from antagonistic and exploitive class relations; instead, workers focus on competing with their colleagues. Edwards' (1979) system of control is another means by which organizations can obtain certain behaviours from their workers.

2.3.4 Elements of Control Systems: Rewards and Discipline

According to Edwards (1979), the increasing size and complexity of companies pose challenges for managers in their attempt to control workers' behaviours. Edwards sought to understand how managers made workers' behaviours as predictable as possible in the context of monopolistic capitalism. He defines control in the workplace as "the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behaviours from workers" (Edwards, 1979: 17). He considers control as three-fold. One element is the coordination of work tasks by capitalists or managers. This direction of work was previously illuminated in the discussion of workers' alienation from the labour process (see Marx, 1961). Prescribed ways to perform work are established in order to maximize the resources of capitalists; such direction can come from workers' supervisors and the technology relied upon in the production process. Another element of control is the evaluation of workers' behaviours. This assessment allows supervisors to regulate and

monitor behaviours. Disciplinary action that rewards or reprimands certain behaviours is also an element of control. Managers can use this disciplinary apparatus to enforce the compliance of workers and elicit their co-operation. Ideal behaviours are considered to be indicative of personal attributes, which workers can aspire to possess. Examples of these attributes include company loyalty (workers identify with the company), and being rule-oriented and dependable.

According to Edwards (1979), workplaces that have all three elements are highly controlled. He places the greatest emphasis on the rewards and discipline apparatus because it aligns the interests of workers with the interests of capitalists. Similar to the game-system previously described, rules are established in the disguise of desirable (or undesirable) behaviours that are either rewarded or reprimanded; game-playing parallels the rewards and disciplinary apparatus of Edwards' control system. Work-life research consistently finds that workers perceive they will face career repercussions if they do not follow prescribed ideal behaviours (Higgins et al., 2008; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Thompson, Beauvais, Lyness, 1999). This element of control is further discussed in relation to FWPs in the section on workplace culture below.

2.3.5 Summary Remarks

This section reviewed theoretical perspectives that explain how capitalists or managers control workers' behaviours. This control was carried out through the exploitation and alienation of workers (Marx, 1961), direct control or responsible autonomy (Friedman, 1977), game-playing (Burawoy, 1979; Sharone, 2004; Stewart, 2004), and elements of a control system (Edwards, 1979). There is considerable overlap

among these strategies. These perspectives consider class inequality as the basis of disruption in the labour process. Workers and capitalists have conflicting or different interests. Capitalists aim to accumulate capital through surplus value. Presumably, workers are not interested in exploiting themselves by earning less than their total labour value. Hence, capitalists attempt to control workers' behaviours in order to ensure some order and predictability in the labour process.

Workers' alienation from the labour process helps us understand why FWP are not widely utilized by workers. If workers cannot choose how to perform their work activities, then they cannot choose to use FWPs. FWPs then, are considered to be an interest of workers. Accordingly, they are not likely to be given as rewards from managers for exemplifying desirable behaviours or performance levels.

Individual agency is included in management control perspectives through the concept of class resistance. Organized worker resistance was discussed in relation to direct control and responsible autonomy (Friedman, 1977), but it was not mentioned or elaborated on in the other preceding sections. This concept reflects the collective action of workers who refuse to conform to the constraining and controlling techniques used on them (see Burawoy, 1979; Friedman, 1977). How individuals experience and negotiate these techniques at the individual level receives little attention from management control perspectives.

The salience of class relations in the perspectives presented in this section is a short-coming because workers are considered a homogeneous group. Other sets of relations including gender, race, ethnicity, and age influence production and distribution and are given little attention. Gender relations, for example, influence how pressures at

work are experienced because there are different social expectations for men and women. The belief that women should be primarily responsible for domestic work and caregiving continues to be present in our society (Crompton, 2006; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Shalla, 2007); this ideology of domesticity guides attitudes and behaviours in taken-for-granted ways (Luxton & Corman, 2001; Williams, 1995). Studies documenting the means through which workers are controlled often do not consider these different gendered expectations (Acker, 1992; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Williams, 1995). Even if greater autonomy or power was given to workers, these gendered expectations likely lead to some divergence in the degree of control that men and women possess over where, when, and for how long they work. How gender relations and the structured relations of race, ethnicity, and age influence the structure of work and workers' experiences are elaborated on and discussed further in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Workplace culture was alluded to in the discussion on game-playing as a consequence of the control mechanisms employed by managers. The same could be said of elements of Edwards' (1979) control system. Certain behaviours are established as either desirable or undesirable, as management attempts to align workers' interests with the interests of capitalists. Both game-playing and control systems imply that managers can create shared values and common behaviours in the workplace. The idea that a workplace culture can be engineered (Kunda, 1992) is discussed next.

2.4 Workplace Culture

Many work-life scholars favour the concept of work-family culture articulated by Thompson and colleagues (1999).⁸ They define it as the “shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and family lives” (Thompson et al., 1999: 394). According to Thompson and colleagues, whether an organization supports and values work-family integration is dependent on the time demands or work expectations of workers, the perception of whether managers are supportive of employees’ work-family balance, and whether employees will experience negative consequences for their careers if time is taken from work for their family responsibilities. Organizational time is a dimension of a work-family culture because the expected hours of work required of workers may interfere with their ability to fulfill their family responsibilities (Thompson et al., 1999). Supervisors are the gatekeepers of FWPs; if unsupportive of employees’ use of FWPs, they may reprimand workers who use such policies and practices. Accordingly, the potential consequences for individual careers is a dimension of a work-family culture because it has the potential to constrain workers from using available FWPs. Together, the three dimensions of work-family culture help produce and reproduce the informal rules which workers follow in order to avoid negative career consequences. These rules are a vehicle of control. Studies that use this work-family culture concept capture its three dimensions through quantitative data in order to determine the relationship between a

⁸ According to the Social Science Citation Index search engine, Thompson et al., (1999) have been cited 248 times as of March 23, 2012. Examples of those who used their work-family culture concept or some version of it as an independent variable in analyses include Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano (2008), Minnotte, Cook, & Minnotte (2010), Poelmans, Stepanova, & Masuda (2008), and Sahibzada, Hammer, Neal, & Kuang (2005). Examples of those who appear to accept the work-family culture concept and do not critically review its conceptual bases in their literature review include Drach-Zahavy & Somech (2008), Kossek & Van Dyne (2008), and Mullen, Kelley, & Kelloway (2008).

work-family culture and the use (or non-use) of FWPs, as well as other variables (see Sahibzada et al., 2005; Thompson et al., 1999 for an index of questions).

The work-family culture concept implies that individuals may disagree and dislike an unsupportive work-family culture because of their own work-family challenges. But, it does not acknowledge individuals who contest a work-family culture. Consequently, consensus is assumed (see Parker, 2000). Workers are thought to accept and deal with the work-family culture that management establishes. There is no indication of how organizational change could occur because interaction is not addressed either. This omission is a major drawback of the work-family culture concept because interaction is the most central element of organizational culture. As mentioned earlier, the work-family culture is based on organizational culture's other fundamental elements of "shared assumptions, beliefs, and values" (Thompson et al., 1999: 394). But, culture is "grounded in" and experienced through interactions (Fine, 1979, 2006: 1). Elements of it are learned and reproduced through interaction. Accordingly, the work-family culture concept does not address how such a culture is produced and reproduced or changed.

Work-family culture is often presumed to exist as a separate entity from the entire culture of the organization and from structured social relations, such as class and gender. One aspect of an organizational culture cannot simply be separated from shared working values and behaviours (Parker, 2000). A common expectation of long hours of work, for example, is a behavioural dimension of the entire organizational culture that may have implications for the use of FWPs and workers' work-life integration. Accordingly, an organization's culture is a "system" that should not be broken down into sub-systems based on particular topics (Fine, 2006). Additionally, managers' lack of support of FWPs

may stem more from their preferred controlling and manipulating techniques than their attitudes about work and family (Callan, 2007).

Considering the entire culture of an organization is hence, a better approach and is another way that workplace culture is conceptualized in work-life scholarship (Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Taylor, 1996). This conceptualization is referred to by some as a “root” culture approach (Callan, 2007). This lens considers culture to be based on the underlying assumptions related to business operations (Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Taylor, 1996). Gender relations are considered to be embedded in the rules and beliefs about how work should be performed. Indeed, Lewis and Taylor (1996: 112) assert that “organizational cultures are deep-seated beliefs about gender, the nature of work and the ideal employee.” Through interaction, workers learn, teach, and contest these values and informal rules about acceptable behaviours (Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Lewis & Taylor, 1996). Research guided by this root culture approach often uses qualitative data to capture the complexity of an organizational culture.

An emergent theme from this approach, as well as other sociological work, is that of the *gendered* ideal worker (Bailyn, 2006; Callan, 2007; Connidis & Kemp, 2011; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Taylor, 1996; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Rapoport et al., 2002; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Williams, 1995). Ideal worker behaviours, apparent in contemporary workplaces, that are perceived to be indicative of a worker’s commitment and competence include being present at work and working long hours (Blair-Loy, 2004; Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Connidis & Kemp, 2011; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009; Ranson &

Dryburgh, 2011; Sharone, 2004). These ideal behaviours are considered gendered because they are able to be better realized by men who often take less responsibility for child and elder care than do women.

When workers strive to work long hours in order to demonstrate their competency and commitment to the company, they are considered to exert competitiveness and aggressiveness (Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Rapoport et al., 2002). These behaviours are traditionally considered masculine. The expectation that workers consider work as their sole or primary responsibility is gendered because it is based on men's non-working lives; women are expected to be and are the primary caregivers of their families (Acker, 1990; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Rapoport et al., 2002; Williams, 1995). Those who are primary caregivers are at a disadvantage because they cannot prioritize their work to the same extent as those who are not primary caregivers (see Daly, Ashbourne, & Hawkins, 2008 for a review of the work-life conflict of fathers). As recently noted, however, all is not equal between men and women. Generally speaking, women cannot adopt ideal worker behaviours with the same ease as men, thus (re)producing gender inequity in the workplace (Perrons et al., 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002).

Workers experience this gendered root culture through interaction with supervisors and colleagues (Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Lewis & Taylor, 1996). For instance, when employees request to use available FWPs, their managers may voice their own concerns about the employees' commitment to the company (see e.g., Hochschild, 1997). Through interactions employees may perceive the potential negative career consequences of not adhering to the idealized behaviours. Using FWPs may appear undesirable to workers in the context of a gendered root culture

because such practices signal workers' responsibilities and lives outside of work (Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009). Perceived career repercussions were also captured in the work-family culture concept but interpretations vary across the two conceptual lenses based on how culture itself is perceived (e.g., its dimensions and source).

The root culture's conceptualization includes individual action but continues to imply that the source of culture is the interaction between structured gender relations and business operations. How individuals negotiate with this culture may reinforce or challenge it but they do not necessarily contribute to the creation of the organizational culture. One could argue that by contesting the presumptions of an organization's culture, individuals are contributing to the creation of a different culture. Nonetheless, this kind of influence is not emphasized in the root culture concept. An implication of emphasizing the structural processes of a workplace culture is presuming homogeneity among organizations and their cultures, with the exception of differences in their business operations.

Fine's (2006) shopfloor culture concept acknowledges the possibility of cross-firm variation. According to Fine, culture is influenced by individual agency and structural processes (Fine, 2006; Harrington & Fine, 2000). Fine's conceptualization of culture was used earlier to critique the work-family culture concept articulated by Thompson and colleagues (1999). Workplace culture is considered "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (Fine, 1979: 734, 2006: 2). It is not "an amorphous, indescribable mist" but rather exists in small

groups among people who work within close proximity to one another hence, the term shopfloor culture (Fine, 1979: 733, 2006).⁹ Shopfloor cultures are expected to vary. A large company may have many shopfloor cultures, but this number is sharply reduced in small firms employing twenty or fewer people. The interaction of structural processes or structured social relations (e.g., gender) and a firm's business operations, as well as the individuals who work together, can lead to variable workplace practices and experiences of work.

Fine's (2006) shopfloor culture concept does not adequately address how members of a culture vary in how they experience it. Recall that research based on the root culture concept suggested that experiences differ according to one's gender position because ideal worker behaviours promoted in the workplace are gendered (see Callan, 2007; Lewis & Taylor, 1996). Drawing on the life course perspective, individuals' experiences may also vary because of their linked lives with other firm members. The life course principle of linked lives posits that people's lives are embedded in relationships (Bengtson, Elder, & Putney, 2005; Elder, 1991; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Individuals' lives are interdependent with the lives of other individuals in their lives; accordingly, changes in one's life may influence the lives of other individuals (see Elder, 1991; Elder et al., 2003). In life course scholarship, the concept of linked lives is most frequently applied to family relationships, perhaps because they occur over a longer span of time compared to other relationships (Bengtson et al., 2005; Moen & Hernandez, 2009). According to Heinz (2001), examining the interdependent lives of employers and

⁹ Parker (2000) also emphasizes small groups (e.g., based on departments or professional positions) but to illustrate divisions within an organization based on the identities of self and others. Parker argues that these divisions indicate that organizations do not have one united culture, and hence, managers cannot control it but can only intervene through manipulations. I favour Fine's (2006) conception because he includes structural processes.

employees can be informative regarding work trends because structural processes are expressed and experienced through these relationships (also see Elder et al., 2003). Linked lives can also influence the structure of opportunities for individuals (Dannefer, 2003); this outcome is likely if the interdependent ties are between individuals who hold different levels of power in a particular context.

I draw on Fine's (2006) concept of shopfloor culture in the conceptual framework used in this dissertation. I will elaborate further on how it connects to FWP's and other processes at the end of this chapter.

2.5 Feminist Perspectives

Feminist arguments were presented earlier in this chapter to identify shortcomings in managerial control perspectives and to illustrate how ideal worker behaviours are not gender neutral. A feminist perspective questions the taken-for-granted assumptions about gender in the workplace and in society at large. These approaches assess hegemonic or prevailing power structures in society in relation to gender and explicitly acknowledge the interdependency of work and family in society. Two interconnected topics that dominate feminist discussions are addressed here. They include the separate spheres of life and gendered workplaces.

2.5.1 Separate Spheres of Life

Feminist scholarship previously reviewed in this chapter argued that the requirement of workers to consider work as their sole or primary obligation disadvantages women in the workplace because women are disproportionately

responsible for family responsibilities (see e.g., Connidis & Kemp, 2011; Hochschild, 1997). Workers' non-working lives are typically not incorporated into workplaces' organization of the labour process (see e.g., Luxton & Corman, 2001). This omission suggests that the ideology of separate spheres continues to be prominent in society (Acker, 1990; Crompton, 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002). The ideology of separate spheres is premised on the belief that men are better suited for the public sphere, involving employment and politics, because of their aggressive and competitive nature; in contrast, women are better suited for the private sphere, involving caregiving and household work, because of their nurturing and social skills. The attributes given to men and women were historically thought to be associated with biological, physical, and psychological gender differences (Crompton, 2006).

Feminist scholars argue that the essentialist claims underlying the ideology of separate spheres are based on naturalized assumptions of masculine and feminine stereotypical attributes (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Crompton, 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002). The activities in each sphere are either prototypically masculine or feminine (see Charles & Grusky, 2004); for instance, the public sphere requires aggression, whereas the private sphere requires nurturing. The problematic implications of separate spheres include the treatment of women as inferior beings compared to men, the constriction of women to the home, and the devaluation of domestic labour (Corman & Luxton, 2007; Crompton, 2006; Hagestad, 2003; Krüger & Levy, 2001; Luxton & Corman, 2001).

The gendered expectations in the separate spheres ideology support gender differences in families. Specifically, its gender essentialist attributes extend to the division of labour within a home and reflect the ideology of domesticity. The ideology of

domesticity values the traditional male-breadwinner and female-homemaker division of labour (Corman & Luxton, 2007; Crompton, 2006; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Williams, 1995). In this division of labour, men are the sole income-earners and women are the homemakers or persons responsible for domestic labour, which includes household chores and caregiving. During the first half of the 20th century, this division of labour was a middle-class ideal. Working-class families could not afford it, but they aspired to have this arrangement (McMullin, 2005; Moen, 1992). Privileged women who could afford to stay home did so, but tended to hire other women to perform the household's domestic labour. After World War II, the economy improved. Consequently, the male-breadwinner and female-homemaker division of labour became more commonplace and emerged as a general trend in addition to an ideal arrangement for couples to pursue (Gerson, 1993; McMullin, 2005; Moen, 1992).

Over the past few decades, social trends in labour arrangements have changed. Increasingly, women are participating in the labour force and men are performing domestic labour, particularly parenting and caregiving responsibilities (Duxbury & Higgins, 1994; Gazso-Windle & McMullin, 2003; Gerson, 1993; Hochschild, 2003; Marshall, 2006). Changes in the participation of men and women in the private and public spheres of life, respectively, have led some scholars (see e.g., Duxbury & Higgins, 1994) to argue that the traditional breadwinner-homemaker arrangement is becoming less of an ideal division of labour. But, a feminist perspective illuminates the persistence of the traditional breadwinner-homemaker arrangement through the continuing expectation of women to be primarily responsible for domestic labour (Acker, 1990; Epstein, 2004; Hochschild, 1997, 2003) and the social disapproval men face if they spend “too much”

time providing care for their children or performing mundane household chores (Epstein, 2004; Hochschild, 1997). Gendered expectations of behaviour continue to be based on the essentialist separate spheres. Together, separate spheres and domesticity contribute to producing and reinforcing gendered workplaces that provide obstacles to FWP.

2.5.2 Gendered Workplaces

The influence of gender relations on the organization of work was mentioned earlier in relation to gendered ideal worker behaviours. Research on contemporary workplaces consistently finds that long hours of work and face-time (presence at work) are perceived as indicative of a worker's commitment and competence (Blair-Loy, 2004; Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Connidis & Kemp, 2011; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Sharone, 2004). The expectation that employees will prioritize their work activities and their current place of employment appears abstract and neutral but presumes that someone else in a worker's life will and can assume family and other non-work responsibilities (Acker, 1990). According to the ideologies of separate spheres and domesticity, women are expected to take on this role. Hence, workplaces are gendered (Acker, 1990; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Williams, 1995). Generally speaking, men and women do not have equal opportunity to fulfill and exceed their managers' expectations of them. This inequity may heighten alongside recent social trends mentioned in Chapter 1 that suggest fewer Canadians have a partner who either does not work or works part-time who can presumably allot a large portion of their time to fulfill family responsibilities or needs (Marshall, 2009).

As argued in Chapter 1, using FWP's can help all workers integrate their work and personal lives. FWP's, however, have gendered connotations in the workplace when available through a HR policy (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Peper et al., 2009). Such practices are often presumed to be primarily for mothers or all women. As a result, men and some women resist using them (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Peper et al., 2009). This connotation reflects the embeddedness of gendered relations in the workplace. Using FWP's may involve behaviours that contrast with ideal worker behaviours. They signal, for example, that workers have important responsibilities outside of work. Family-related responsibilities should be women's responsibilities, according to the separate spheres ideology. Accordingly, FWP's are perceived to be for women and can negatively affect one's career (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Peper et al., 2009).

2.5.3 Summary Remarks

Feminist perspectives regarding work and FWP's are informative about how deeply entrenched gendered relations are in society, the workplace, and families (Acker, 1990; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). These perspectives give priority to the interconnection between gender social relations, production, and reproduction. Individual agency, however, receives little attention. It is suggested that if a group of workers contested the gendered nature of a firm little change would take place. Rather, societal change needs to occur in order to expel gender essentialism and male primacy (Charles & Grusky, 2004); what men are expected to do regarding paid work is valued more than what women are expected to do regarding domestic labour (Creese, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Luxton & Corman, 2001).

The tendency to focus on the embeddedness of gender essentialism and male primacy in society and in the workplace may be a reaction to countering theoretical perspectives that place a strong emphasis on individual choice. Becker's (1985) rational action approach, for example, presumes that people attempt to maximize the utility of their time and resources. According to Becker, women have a natural comparative advantage in being a caregiver and thus, exert rational behaviour to put more effort into domestic labour and less effort into paid labour; likewise, men have less comparative advantage in being a caregiver so they invest in their paid work. This essentialist argument justifies and reproduces the male-breadwinner and female-homemaker division of labour, or some modified version of it.

Becker has been widely criticized by sociologists (see e.g., Bielby & Bielby, 1988), but his theoretical perspective has positively influenced other sociologists (see e.g., Hakim, 2005). According to Hakim (2005), women's labour force participation and their employment status (full-time or part-time) are based on their preference regarding work and family; they are either oriented to work, family, or adapting work (e.g., reduced hours, less demanding job) to family. She notes that men are typically work-oriented because they have higher testosterone levels and as a result, are more aggressive and competitive in the workplace. That is, men have a natural comparative advantage over women as paid workers. Becker and Hakim emphasize individual action over structural relations and make gender essentialist arguments. Alternatively, the countering feminist arguments are largely structural.

The emphasis on the entrenched gender relations over individual action and other processes imply that organizations are homogeneous. Although no organizations are

unique, how gendered relations organize the structure of work may vary (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2009; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). For instance, firms differ regarding their gender regimes; whether firms have a paternal, maternal, masculine, or balanced structure is based on the division of work, distribution of power, emotional climate in the firm, and symbolic representations of gender that firm members draw upon in interactions (Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). Cross-firm variation may also occur because of the intersecting structured social relations of age and race/ethnicity along with gender and class that can influence the organization of work (McMullin, 2010). Working long hours, for example, is not only a heroic masculine attribute but also a youthful attribute (Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011). Youthfulness signifies a lack of family responsibilities and the ability to work without distractions for an unlimited amount of time (Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011).

Thus far, I have reviewed theoretical perspectives from the sociology of work and from work-life scholarship that explain why FWP's are not available to all individuals and why available FWP's are not widely used. This overview suggests that theoretical orientations tend to give primacy to either structure or agency and either gender or class relations. What is needed is a theoretical perspective that is both multi-levelled and multi-directional. I draw upon McMullin's (2010) coalescence framework to capture these complexities. In the following section I discuss this framework and show how it is modified for this dissertation's purpose.

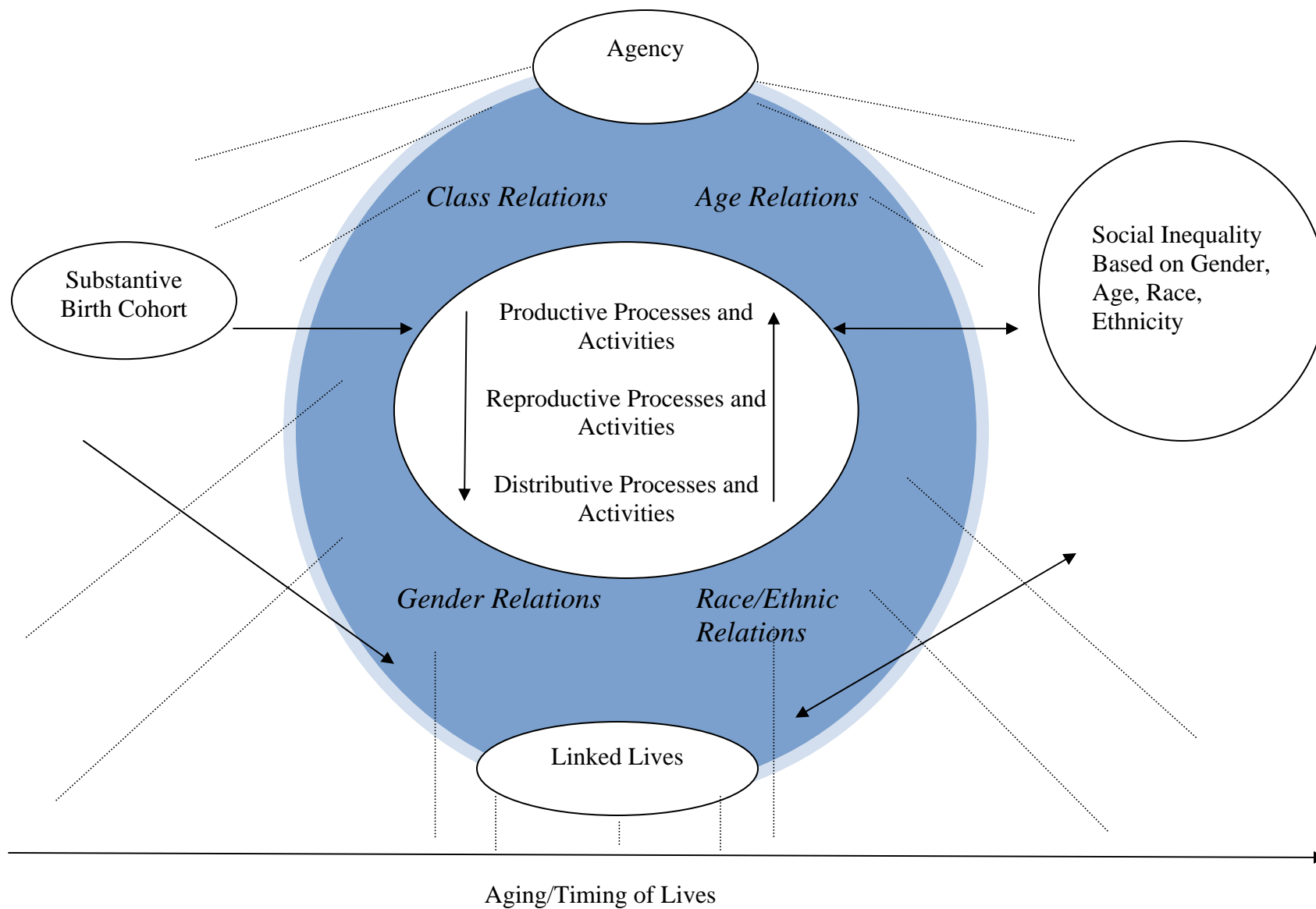
2.6 Conceptual Framework

This dissertation draws from McMullin's (2004, 2010) CAGE framework. This framework interconnects structured social relations of class, age, gender and ethnicity/race (hence the CAGE) and agency with the life course perspective's central dimensions of time (temporality of people's lives), process (changing lives in a changing society), and context (setting in which people live) (see Elder, 1991) to explain why social inequality occurs. McMullin refers to social inequality abstractly and concretely. According to McMullin (2004: 134), "abstract outcomes are the structural hierarchy of inequality in which categorical differences between sexes, races, ethnic groups, age groups, and classes are reinforced and, in some cases, modified." Inequality also occurs concretely where individuals experience real advantages and disadvantages. This framework is illustrated in Figure 2.1. Below, I describe this framework and then discuss how I adapt it for this study.

2.6.1 Life Course Principles

The dimensions of time, process, and context influenced the organization of McMullin's (2010) conceptual framework in Figure 2.1. In the far left of Figure 2.1 is the

Figure 2.1: McMullin's (2010) CAGE Framework



concept of substantive birth cohort. McMullin uses this concept to capture the gender, class, race, ethnicity, and generational positions into which individuals are born.

Generation is considered as a social location in itself and represents the year one is born into and the socio-political events while coming of age (Mannheim, 1952). According to McMullin, it is similar to the lives-in-time-and-place life course principle which assumes that “individuals and birth cohorts are influenced by historical context and place” (Elder et al., 2003: 12). How individuals experience contextual changes from a historical event, such as the recent economic crisis (2008), stays with individuals throughout their life course (Hardy & Waite, 1997; McMullin, 2010). Where individuals are born and live are also influential factors in terms of experiencing outcomes of social inequality (i.e., regional unemployment tied to the recession).

The life course principles of aging, timing of lives, and linked lives are positioned at the bottom of Figure 2.1. The aging dimension refers to the passage of time in individuals’ lives and the accompanying biopsychosocial processes individuals experience (McMullin, 2010). These processes refer to the biological, psychological, and social definitions of age (e.g., retiree). They signify the notion that aging is a life long process beginning from birth (Elder et al., 2003).

The timing of lives principle presumes that the “antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavioural patterns vary according to their timing in a person’s life” (Elder et al., 2003: 12). Individuals vary in their timing, sequencing, and duration of life transitions that in turn, affect subsequent life course experiences (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Transitions (i.e., becoming a parent) indicate a change in state and status and mark the trajectories or pathways (i.e. employment, family) that

individuals participate in for durations of time (Elder, 1991; Elder & Johnson, 2003; George, 1993). The timing of individuals' lives is not independent of cultural expectations of when certain transitions should occur (i.e., marriage) or of historical events; the stage of life when an individual experiences major events, such as the recent recession, may influence subsequent life course transitions and experiences, such as job opportunities and family transitions.

Individuals' trajectories and transitions occur in tandem with the trajectories and transitions of others; this interconnection is captured through the principle of linked lives. Recall from earlier in this chapter that the linked lives concept considers individuals' lives as embedded in relationships and thus, changes in one's life occur in context of the lives of others and vice versa (Bengtson et al., 2005; Elder, 1991; Elder et al., 2003). In addition to this interdependence at the individual level, socio-historical influences, such as gendered expectations or social policies, are expressed and experienced through these relationships (Elder et al., 2003: 13). For instance, maternity and parental leaves in Canada and associated gendered expectations with respect to who takes the time off are experienced through employer-employee work relationships and spousal relationships. The concept of linked lives captures multiple levels of social life.

The life course principles reviewed here highlight the dynamics of individuals' lives. Individuals are not simply a reflection of their occupation but have different backgrounds and interests. The incorporation of individuals' lives in McMullin's (2010) framework complements her stance on the sociological dualism of structure and agency.

2.6.2 *Structured Social Relations and Agency*

Context is a central dimension of the life course perspective but it often does not capture the structured social relations between groups of individuals (i.e., class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race) that are of particular interest to sociologists (Hagestad & Dannefer, 2001). The structured social relations dimension in McMullin's (2010) CAGE framework fills this gap; they are located in the middle of Figure 2.1. According to McMullin, these sets of social relations are characterized by power and intersect with one another. Unlike the feminist perspectives previously reviewed, gender relations do not take primacy over other structured social relations. The distribution of rewards, privileges, and resources, as well as of oppression and disadvantage, depends on a group's relative social location on the intersecting hierarchies. Structured social relations are embedded in institutional and structural levels, as well as individual's relationships with others.

Structured social relations are organizing features of productive, reproductive, and distributive processes and activities (McMullin, 2010). In Figure 2.1, structured social relations surround these processes and activities to emphasize this influence. Production refers to the economic activities that convert raw materials into valuable objects (and services). Reproduction refers to the making and maintaining of human life that occurs on an individual basis and a general population basis. Distribution refers to how material resources are divided or allocated to individuals. These processes and activities are interrelated, as indicated by the arrows in Figure 2.1.

As discussed earlier, however, workplaces typically do not incorporate family life into their organization but rather expect paid work to be the top priority for employees

(Acker, 1990). Any tension experienced by individuals in their attempts to integrate their paid work and domestic labour are considered individual responsibilities only (Corman & Luxton, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Luxton & Corman, 2001; Williams, 1995). Gendered social relations relatively advantage men over women in both paid work and domestic labour. Women are primarily responsible for domestic labour and accordingly, are expected to make concessions and lessen their work demands in order to accommodate family responsibilities (Epstein, 2004; Hochschild, 1997, 2003). Although some men experience work-life challenges (e.g., are not being the parent they want to be), workplaces and families are likely organized in ways that advantage them as a social group.

The influence of structured social relations of class on the organization of work was previously discussed from a managerial control perspective. Structured social relations of race, ethnicity, and age have yet to be discussed in this chapter. These particular structured social relations tend to be unacknowledged in work-life research, with only a few exceptions (see Gerstel & Sarkisian, 2006). Race, ethnicity, and age are embedded in society and influence individuals' relative access to opportunities, rewards, and privileges in the workplace or labour market. Workplaces are typically organized in ways that advantage workers who are young-to-middle-aged adults, white, and/or of European descent and disadvantage workers who are older adults and youth, a visible minority, and/or whose first language is not English (see Creese, 2007; Das Gupta, 1996; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Duncan, 2003; McMullin & Duerden Comeau, 2011; Reskin, McBrier & Kmec, 1999). For instance, managers sometimes make presumptions about the productivity and skills of workers based on characteristics of a group of

individuals (Reskin et al., 1999; Tomaskovic-Devey & Skaggs 1999). As a result of this statistical discrimination, desirable workers (young, white, English-speaking) tend to have better occupations, earn more money, and have greater access to other benefits, such as employer-funded training, compared to undesirable workers (older, visible minority) (Creese, 2007; Das Gupta, 1996; McMullin & Duerden, 2011). Presumably, workers who are considered less productive and reliable and have relatively less power compared to other (desirable) workers and have limited access to and ability to use FWPs.

According to McMullin (2010), structured social relations are not deterministic of individual lives but lives are not lived outside of these relations either. The dotted lines in Figure 2.1 illustrate the omnipresence of agency in individuals' lives. Through relationships and interactions, individuals experience structured social relations that influence the organization of work and family, as well as other social institutions. Individuals exert human agency by choosing to conform, resist, or do some combination of the two (McMullin, 2010). This consideration of agency modifies its conceptualization in the life course perspective. Initially, the principle of agency captured the pursuit of life goals and sense of self (Giele & Elder, 1998); this concept has altered over time to reflect how "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance" (Elder et al., 2003; Marshall & Mueller, 2003: 20; Settersten & Gannon, 2009). Individuals negotiate with these social structures which may constrain or privilege their choices (Marshall & Mueller, 2003). McMullin's approach emphasizes the structural opportunities and constraints that groups of individuals tend to experience and negotiate based on their class, age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

McMullin's (2010) consideration of structure and agency as interconnecting forces overcomes a shortcoming of the theoretical perspectives reviewed in this chapter. None of the theoretical perspectives adequately addressed human agency. As Figure 2.1 illustrates, structured social relations, production and reproduction, and individual behaviour have reciprocal relationships over time in McMullin's CAGE framework. Hence, it provides a comprehensive explanation for social inequality, whether concrete or abstract. I modify this framework in relation to FWPs and derive the research questions guiding this thesis below.

2.6.3 Modified Conceptual Framework

Chapter 1 noted that this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of organizational structures and practices that receive little attention in work-life research (Kossek & Lambert, 2005). The CAGE framework does not explicitly include workplace factors other than economic processes and activities; but, this does not mean they are not addressed. According to McMullin (2010), organizational structures and practices are outcomes themselves that reflect unequal relations. For instance, gendered workplace practices (i.e., the expectation that work is a worker's sole or top priority) are the result of the interaction between structured gender relations, productive processes and activities, and agency. Generally speaking, such practices advantage men who are more likely to be able to demonstrate their company commitment and competence through long hours of work compared to women. The firm outcomes of interest in this thesis -- FWPs and workplace cultures -- are considered as concrete dimensions of social inequality in Figure 2.2 (far right of the figure); their distribution and structure are reflective of unequal social

relations. The purpose of their inclusion was not to challenge McMullin's CAGE framework but rather to be clear about where the organizational structures and practices studied in this thesis fit conceptually in the framework drawn upon. Explicitly including firm processes helps consider another layer of the social world in research (Krüger & Levy, 2001).

Earlier in this chapter, FWPs were discussed in relation to workers' alienation from the labour process. Lacking control over how to perform work activities implies that workers cannot choose when, where, and/or for how long their work is performed. Accordingly, workers' use of FWPs is limited (Fenwich & Tausig, 2004; Hill et al., 2008). Further, the use of FWPs is also constrained if workers' family or personal lives are not integrated into the organization of the workplace (Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Peper et al., 2009; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). The following two research questions, then, are asked of the small IT firms in this study. First, how do small IT firms compare regarding the flexible workplace practices available and used by employees? Second, how do the behaviours of employees and rules established by management regarding the time and place of work compare among small IT firms?

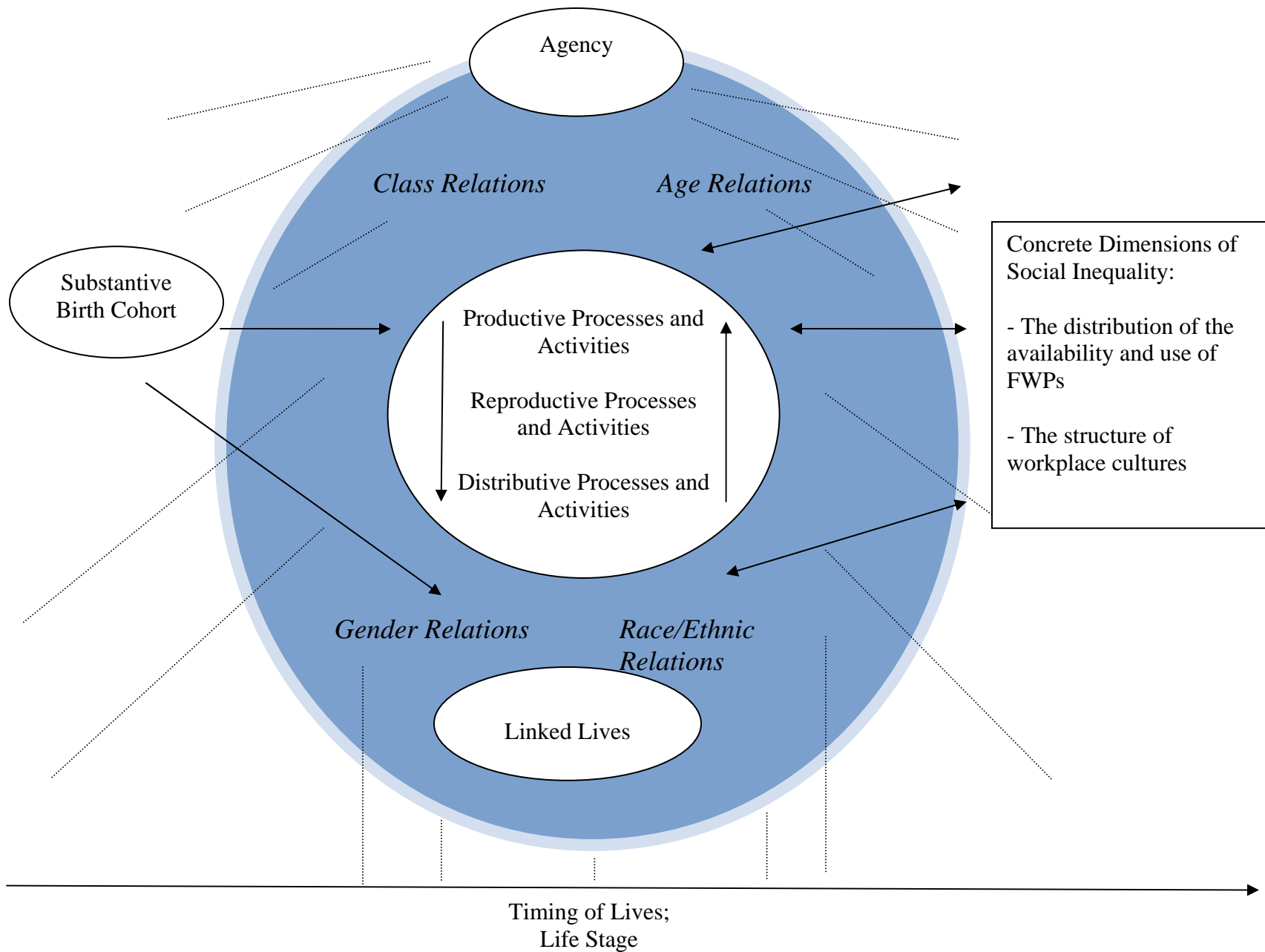
Gender or class relations are not the only potential influence. McMullin's (2010) framework implies that multiple levels of forces may have an effect on workplace processes including FWPs. The life course dimensions of this framework suggest that one's substantive birth cohort, the timing of lives/life stage, and linked lives of individuals could influence a firm's relative flexibility for employees or, at least individuals' experiences of it. Together, these different processes and forces shape the context of a firm. As mentioned earlier, linked lives can influence the structure of

opportunities for individuals (Dannefer, 2003). The opportunity of a worker to use FWPs, for example, may be influenced by interdependent lives with employers, managers, or co-workers. This point leads me to the third research question of this thesis. How do the past employment experiences of small IT firm owners affect their firms' offering and facilitation of flexible workplace practices?

As mentioned earlier, this dissertation draws on Fine's (2006) shopfloor culture concept. Workplace culture refers to the shared knowledge, beliefs, behaviour, and customs that emerge among members, and from controlling and manipulating techniques of managers in small groups (Fine, 2006; Harrington & Fine, 2006). Such techniques can result from class relations through employers' or managers' attempts to make workers' behaviours as predictable as possible (see e.g., Burawoy, 1979). Gender relations were also discussed in relation to obtaining desired behaviours from workers; it was argued that ideal worker behaviours and workplace structures are often established in ways that are separate from the family or personal lives of workers. Workers' negotiations of these expectations reflect individual agency and contribute towards a workplace culture. Accordingly, workplace culture is an outcome that can reinforce the expectations of workers that are based on the structured social relations of gender, age, race, and/or ethnicity and reproduce the relative advantages or disadvantages certain individuals and groups tend to experience. For these reasons, the structure of a workplace culture is considered as a concrete dimension of social inequality in Figure 2.2. It too can be influenced by the life course of individuals within a firm, especially those like managers who are in positions of power.

FWPs and workplace cultures are not necessarily independent outcomes. Past research on this association was discussed earlier in this chapter. This interconnection, however, is not static. The arrow at the bottom of Figure 2.2 emphasizes the passage of time. FWPs and workplace cultures connect reiteratively with individual agency, linked lives, the timing of lives/life stage, productive processes and activities (or, production), and structured social relations. The fourth research question is how do employees experience flexible workplace practices in small IT firms? These various processes and relations are presumed to influence employees' experiences. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology guiding this dissertation and then describe the sample used. I also present the four research questions together.

Figure 2.2: Adaptation of McMullin's (2010) CAGE Framework



Chapter 3: Methods

Data are drawn from the *Workforce Aging in the New Economy* (WANE) project, a cross-national comparative study of information technology (IT) employment.¹⁰ This project involved the collaboration of inter-disciplinary researchers in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The broad objective of the WANE project was to study how workforce aging intersects with workplace transformations in the new economy. The IT industry was considered as an exemplar illustration of a new economy industry (Duerden Comeau, 2003). The themes that guided this project include the dynamics of an aging workforce, the transformation of employment relations, diversity in employment (including gender, race and ethnicity, and age relations), life course transitions, and human resources (HR) policy and practice. Data were collected from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.¹¹

Using WANE data for this dissertation is justified by practical and scientific reasons. I worked on this project for three years as a graduate research assistant and know the data well.¹² These data are well-suited for this dissertation because small firms can be studied as holistic entities and questions on flexible workplace practices (FWPs) were asked. The WANE project employed a case study approach, ensuring that multiple data sources were collected and multiple perspectives were included (Marshall, 1999). Including the perspectives of owners and employees from the same firm allows for

¹⁰ WANE was a funded research project by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) headed by Principal Investigator Dr. Julie McMullin.

¹¹ Data were also collected in Germany and the Netherlands but these data are limited and hence are excluded here.

¹² My responsibilities included coding interview transcripts, writing case study reports and case snapshot summaries, disseminating research results at an IT-related conference, and format editing project books; these activities involved communicating with the Principal Investigator, the project manager and other team members about the codes used, interpretation of the data, and preliminary findings. I also researched government employment regulations and IT industry associations and updated the website (www.wane.ca).

inconsistencies and contradictions to emerge that reflect real life (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Marshall, 1999) and possibly the nature of FWPs (Fox & Sugiman, 1999).

Notably a possible limitation of using WANE data is that the sample is from the IT industry. This industry tends to be characterized as inflexible for employees because workers are predominantly young men and workplaces are often characterized as masculine and youthful (Connidis & Kemp, 2011; Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). There is a preference for workers in IT to have no interests or obligations outside of the work in order to commit long hours to the firm (Connidis & Kemp, 2011; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011); this idealized behaviour concurs with research in other industries (see e.g., Blair-Loy, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009; Rapoport et al., 2002). The need for FWPs may appear to be invisible or non-existent in the lives of many male IT employees and owners, but discounting their experiences results in gender bias (see Perrons et al., 2006). The experiences of FWPs described by those in this dissertation may not reflect the experiences of those in other industries whose workers are not predominantly male. Or, perhaps there are more similarities than one may expect.

The Canadian data set of the WANE project is used in this dissertation. The goal of this thesis is to compare firms not countries. Below, I describe the sampling, data collection, and sample characteristics of the Canadian sample. I also present the research design of this dissertation.

3.1 Sample

The research team established sampling frame parameters in order to determine which firms could participate in the project as cases. Firms had to be comprised of mostly software-related IT occupations, be in operation for at least one year, and have four or more staff members in order to be eligible.¹³ Small enterprises were targeted because little research on IT work considered them, despite their prevalence in the industry. The data for this study were collected between 2004 and 2006. In 2001, 96 percent of computer systems design and related services (or IT) businesses in Canada employed less than 10 people (Da Pont, 2003); one percent of IT businesses employed at least 100 people and businesses that employed between 10 and 99 people made up the remaining three percent (Da Pont, 2003). Comparable data for the present time were available only for the information and communications technologies (ICT) sector in which the IT industry is categorized. In 2008, 82 percent of ICT companies had less than 10 employees and about 14 percent of ICT companies had between 10 and 49 employees (Industry Canada, 2009). Due to the large presence of IT firms in this sector (79 percent of companies) (Industry Canada, 2009), we can infer that small firms continue to be widespread in IT.

The sampling frame was further defined in each locale and chosen based on project researchers' location. The Canadian sample was drawn from Ottawa, London, and Calgary. London and Calgary were chosen because of their geographic proximity to the postsecondary institutions (the University of Western Ontario and the University of

¹³ Our interest in software-related IT occupations corresponds to specific industry codes. e.g., North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 54151– Computer Systems Design and Related Services; Australia ANZSIC code 783 - Computer Services Industry.

Calgary) where Canadian research investigators were located. Ottawa was chosen because it had a high concentration of IT companies.

Online local business directories and key informants were used to find and contact potential firms or case studies. These directories include the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), Ottawa Software Directory, Carleton Start-ups (Ottawa), and Calgary InfoPort. Researchers contacted firms (n=100) from these directories for a short telephone survey that took approximately 10 minutes. Researchers spoke with an owner or a senior manager. The purpose of this survey was to learn about the regional IT landscape of the chosen cities and determine whether firms met the eligibility criteria to participate. The survey included general questions about the small firm's business (e.g., product or service, years of operation), its workforce (e.g., number of employees), and the IT field (e.g., subcontractors, skilled worker shortages), as well as if the firm or participant would participate as either a case or a key informant. Of the 100 firms surveyed, 42 firms were asked to participate in the study as a case. Seventeen firms agreed to participate. An additional case was sought through a key informant and selected during the interview process for comparison reasons; it was an IT personnel agency or "body shop." Key informants were also used to sample contractors and employees who were employed in larger firms that did not participate as case studies and hence are excluded here. Selection bias may have occurred, whereby the firms that agreed to participate differ in kind to the firms that refused to participate in the study.

Owners received formal invitations via email to participate in the study. A follow-up telephone call took place to negotiate the firm's participation. These negotiations continued during a scheduled meeting between an owner and the research team leader at

the firm site. If the owner agreed to participate, a case study agreement was signed by both parties. Firms agreed to provide research team members with a list of employee contact information and access to HR documents, as well as allow employees time off to participate in the study. In return, the research team agreed to supply the firm with a research report, consult on the research findings, and provide access to international reports. Firms were also invited to a conference held in Ottawa where results were to be presented at a conference. Fieldwork in Canada took place between September, 2004 and October, 2005.

Firm owners were the gatekeepers to each potential case study and its employees. Sometimes certain staff members were excluded from the employee contact list because they held a non-IT position (e.g., administration) or were contractors. It is possible that an employee with whom an owner had a contentious relationship was purposely omitted from the contact list, but such an employment relation issue would likely come up during the interviews with other participants from the same firm. No incidence of this nature occurred.

Potential respondents for the in-depth interviews at each firm were to be selected depending on the number of employees and occupational groups at a particular firm. Typically, however, all staff members in the Canadian firms were invited to participate. They were handed invitations to the study by a research member after the case agreement meeting or by an owner at a later date. If they agreed to participate, a date and time for an interview were negotiated. If they declined, no further contact was made. After the interviews, participants were given a web-survey invitation. Employees who were not interviewed were emailed web-survey invitations.

3.2 Data Collection

Multiple data sources were collected at each firm. *Archival data* about each participating firm were obtained from newspaper and magazine articles, whether print or electronic, and the firm's website. If available, firm-specific newsletters, reports, collective agreements, and HR policy documents were also collected. Researchers took *observational notes* that described the firm's environment, physical layout, and organizational structure. Additional data sources include *in-depth qualitative interviews* and *quantitative web-surveys* with participating employees, managers, and owners.

Most of the in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face (n= 138) but a few were over the telephone (n= 3). Face-to-face interviews took place in private offices and conference rooms at the interviewee's place of work, or off-work premises at coffee shops or food courts. Interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours but the majority were typically an hour. These interviews were recorded by tape or digitally and then transcribed verbatim into electronic documents, which were uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. The interviewers were all white and mostly female and younger (late 20s to late 30s); one interviewer was male and one interviewer was middle-aged (50s). The personal characteristics of these interviewers did not seem to elicit different responses.

Some variation occurred regarding the exact questions asked but this reflects the nature of semi-structured interviews. All interviewers covered the topic areas outlined in the interview guide (see Appendix B). They include:

- Employment Relations (career management, how work gets done, the structure of the firm, and the workplace culture)
- Life Course of the Individual (life course issues in relation to the firm, significant events in their IT careers, experiences of the 2000-2001 downturn and other industry insecurities, educational and employment transitions, and work-life balance issues)
- Human Relations Issues (recruitment, retention, and turnover; informal and formal training; compensation systems; health and safety; retirement and pensions; redundancy, holiday and leave; and flexible workplace practices)

Specific topic areas of interest in this dissertation include flexible workplace policies and practices, employment and family transitions, work-life balance issues, and life course issues in relation to the firm.

Characteristics of individuals and firms were also asked about or noted by interviewers. Individual characteristics include the interviewee's gender, age, marital status, parental status, whether a visible minority, whether a contractor, occupational group, and the year hired at the current firm. Firm characteristics include the number of employees, year of inception, ownership type, and area of specialization. These personal and firm characteristics were saved with the interviews in the NVivo software package.

The web-surveys were self-administered questionnaires performed online; paper versions were available if preferred but no request for this method was made. The web-survey was comprehensive. It included questions about individuals' demographic characteristics, education, employment and personal histories, as well as their

experiences, attitudes, and opinions about their current workplace and the IT industry. Participants could complete the survey in stages or in one sitting; it took about 40-60 minutes to finish. These quantitative data were compiled by an external source (MSI Inc.) and exported into SPSS, a quantitative data analysis software package.

The specific web-survey questions of interest in this dissertation are presented in Table 3.1. These questions concern whether employers fully or partially provide non-salary benefits to employees and whether respondents participated in special work arrangements.¹⁴ The majority of respondents had the option of flexible working hours (74 percent) or working from outside of the office (61 percent). What flexible working hours referred to was not specified in the questionnaire. The term suggests variability in the timing of when work is performed (e.g., flex-time) or in the amount of time spent performing work (e.g., reduced hours) (see Hill et al., 2008).

Participation in special work arrangements was much lower than access to non-salaried benefits relating to FWPs; this difference, however, supports past research (see e.g., Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Flex-time was the most commonly used arrangement by respondents (31 percent); this usage parallels the national data (37 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2009). Job-sharing and retirement transition schedules were not used by respondents; job-sharing involves workers sharing a full-time job and transitioning to retirement involves reducing hours on an annual, monthly, or daily basis. A few

¹⁴ Other non-salary benefits and incentives asked about include: life insurance (Q18a1); disability insurance (Q18a2); a drug plan (Q18b); a dental plan (Q18c); an extended health care plan (Q18d); a retirement pension plan (not including federal pensions- or groups RRSPs) (Q18f); training cost/paid courses (Q18k); car allowances/car loans (Q18l); subsidy to purchase computer (Q18m); career management (Q18n); recreation facilities and/or memberships (Q18o); professional membership (Q18p); organized social activities (Q18r); internet access, cellular phone, computer (Q18t); free or subsidized parking or public transit subsidized (Q18u); complimentary beverages and food (Q18v); and other non-salary benefits and incentives (Q18w).

respondents participated in work-sharing, which refers to reducing one's hours in order to avoid lay-offs, and other special arrangements.

Table 3.1: Availability and Use of Flexible Workplace Practices among WANE Canadian Participants

FWPs	Yes		Total (n)
	Percentage	Count (n)	
Available (Q18)			
Flexible working hours	74	75	101
Possibility to work from outside the office	61	62	101
Utilized (Q76)			
Job-sharing	0	0	93
Work-sharing to avoid lay-offs	4	4	93
Retirement transition schedule	0	0	93
Flex-time	31	31	93
A compressed work-week	6	6	93
Other arrangements	7	7	93

SOURCE: WANE web-survey data.

NOTE: Responses for the option 'don't know' were considered missing data and not included in table calculations. One respondent (1101016) was excluded because responses are possibly false; for example, this respondent was in his twenties and claimed to participate in all of the FWPs mentioned including a retirement transition schedule.

Case study reports and *case snapshots* were sources of data created after a case participated (see Appendices C and D for templates). These were summary documents written by research team members in order to facilitate comparative analyses. Case study reports organized the broad themes of the interview guide (e.g., HR issues) and aspects of the observational notes and archival information (e.g., the HR booklet), highlighted prevalent issues and policy concerns, and documented how access was obtained and who participated at each firm. Firm snapshots were condensed one page versions of the case study reports; they included notes on the firm's characteristics and composition, unique features, prevalent issues, the dates and times of the fieldwork, and the participation rates.

In its entirety, the WANE project involved 399 in-depth interviews and 452 web-surveys from members of 47 IT firms in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the

United States. The overall participation rates were 86 percent for the interviews and 46 percent for the web-survey. In Canada, the participation rates were 81 percent for the interviews and 60 percent for the web-surveys. Of the 18 firms that participated in Canada, five were in Ottawa, eight were in London, and five were in Calgary. From these local regions, 141 individuals were interviewed and 107 individuals participated in the survey. Not all of the interview respondents participated in the web-survey (n= 44) and a few web-survey participants were not interviewed (n= 8).

3.3 Ethics

In each national region, research teams submitted an ethics application to the review board of their home institutions. Consent was obtained from every participant in the project. Interview respondents signed a consent form or gave verbal consent if the interview was on the telephone. Respondents were informed that they could refuse to answer any question and withdraw from the interview at any point. They were also assured that what they said was confidential and would not get back to their employer. Web-survey participants were also guaranteed such confidentiality; their consent was presumed to be given upon filling out the questionnaire.

In order to preserve confidentiality, firms and individuals were given identification numbers in lieu of their respective names. In this dissertation, firms are not referred to by their identification number but rather a given pseudonym for the ease of reading (see Table 3.2). One firm, referred to here as ComTech, had two locations which are referred to as City A and City B. Further, the interview transcripts were blinded, whereby the surnames of individuals were omitted and the names of products and

services, websites, and other companies (e.g., clients, previous employer) were given pseudonyms. All project data are stored on a secure server. Hard copies of interview transcripts and other company materials are stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office.

Table 3.2: Firms by their Identification Number, Code Name, and Pseudonym

International case no.	Canada code name	Pseudonym
101	CAN1LON	E&C Solutions
102	CAN2LON	Net Host
105	CAN3LON	Biz Software
103	CAN4LON	Custom Software
104	CAN5LON	FC Software
106	CAN6LON	Online Design
110	CAN7LON	SoftBytes
112	CAN8LON	SysSolutions
109	CAN1CAL	A&S Systems
108	CAN2CAL	GP Solutions
107	CAN3CAL	Consyst
111, 119	CAN4CAL	WebBytes
118	CAN5CAL	HR Tech
113	CAN1OTT	IT Consulting
114	CAN2OTT	PSIT
115	CAN3OTT	Interface Consulting
117	CAN4OTT	ComTech
116	CAN5OTT	Advanced Chips

3.4 Sample Characteristics

The characteristics of the firms sampled in Canada are presented in Table 3.3; this table is adapted from a table constructed by Jovic, McMullin, and Duerden Comeau (2011) who compiled firm data from fieldwork sources for all study countries. Of the 18 study firms in Canada, 17 firms employed between four and 20 individuals; one firm employed between 21 and 49 individuals. Ten firms were operative for fewer than 10 years, whereas seven firms were operative for more than 11 years but less than 20 years. The majority of these small IT firms specialized in software and web development (72 percent); other firms focused on consulting and business endeavours (22 percent) or

systems analysis and support (six percent). A characteristic added to this table is whether firms were family-owned. To be considered family-owned, there had to be at least two family members working in the business and at least one of them had to own 50 percent or more of the business (Moshavi & Koch, 2005). The five firms that met this description include E&C Solutions, Custom Software, FC Software, Online Design, and A&S Systems.

Table 3.3: Firm Characteristics of the Canadian Sample

Firm characteristics	Canada
Firm size	
4-20	17
21-99	1
Firm age	
<5 years	4
5-10 years	6
11-20 years	7
21 and up years	1
Firm specialization	
Software/web development	13
Systems analysis/support	1
Consulting/business	4
Other	0
Family ownership status	
Family-owned	5
Not Family-owned	13
Total number of cases	18

SOURCE: WANE data are adapted from Table 2.5 in Jovic and colleagues (2011: 27), which presented firm characteristics of firms in all study countries. Family ownership status is derived from interview data.

Multiple respondents were interviewed at each firm (three to 14). Among interview respondents (n= 141), 30 percent were CEOs/Presidents or IT managers, 56 percent were in IT-related positions (programmers, engineers, technicians, analysts, or

other), 13 percent were in non-IT positions (administration, HR, or sales/marketing), and 12 percent were contractors for these firms.

Personal characteristics of the Canadian sample were obtained through the in-depth interviews and web-surveys. Similar descriptions were revealed in both sources; the interview data are used here. The average age of respondents was 37 years old. The majority of respondents were male (77 percent), white (94 percent), married or in a long-term relationship (66 percent), and a parent (54 percent). Respondents varied more by their marital status and parental status compared to their race and gender. Twenty-five percent of respondents were single or never-married and nine percent of respondents were divorced or separated. Just less than half of respondents (46 percent) were childless. Recall from the previous chapter that the conceptual framework used in this dissertation involves the consideration of class, age, gender, and ethnicity and race as intersecting structured social relations. The sample is relatively homogeneous with regard to ethnicity and race and so not much can be made of ethnic and race relations in the data. Notably, these demographic characteristics are similar to the demographic characteristics of the IT industry in Canada (see Gunderson, Jacobs, & Vaillancourt, 2005). This sample was not random or representative of the workforce of small IT firms but does not largely differ from it either.

3.5 Study Research Design

This dissertation aims to enhance the limited knowledge on FWPs in small firms. The following research questions were identified in the previous chapter:

1. How do small IT firms compare regarding the flexible workplace practices available and used by employees?
2. How do the behaviours of employees and rules established by management regarding the time and place of work compare among small IT firms?
3. How do the past employment experiences of small IT firm owners affect their firms' offering and facilitation of flexible workplace practices?
4. How do employees experience flexible workplace practices in small IT firms?

The firm's family-ownership status will be taken into account in such comparisons; whether this is the source of variation across firms or reasons why family-owned firms differ will be examined. As mentioned earlier, these analyses use the Canadian data set of the WANE project. HR Tech, an IT placement agency, was omitted from these analyses; respondents, except the owner, were contractors who worked solely at the company they were placed at and their experiences of FWPs varied accordingly. This omission leaves 17 cases, 103 web-surveys, and 136 interview transcripts to analyze. Seventeen cases falls in the middle range for comparative case studies (Ragin, 2000). Notably, the percentages of the availability and use of FWPs by respondents do not change.

This dissertation employs a multiple case study approach. This approach was mentioned earlier in this chapter because it was also used by the larger WANE project. The multiple data sources and perspectives of this project provide in-depth contextual information and enable firms, or cases, to be studied holistically (Marshall, 1999). This approach presents complexities and contradictions that are difficult to summarize neatly but are reflective of real life and possibly the nature of FWPs in different firms (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Fox & Sugiman, 1999; Lewis, das Dores Guerreiro, & Brannen, 2006;

Marshall, 1999). Analyzing multiple cases together furthers these complexities (Marshall, 1999). Marshall (1999: 387) advises that a multiple case analysis must be “interpretive,” whereby theoretical and contextual considerations inform the reasoning.

Each research question involves a cross-case comparison. But, before these analyses can be performed, a comprehensive understanding of each small firm and its FWPs is necessary. For this first phase, NVivo software was used to help organize the key themes of cases by coding the interview transcripts, observational notes, and case study reports. These codes were used whether respondents were referring to themselves or someone else in the firm. Predetermined codes from the literature included HR policies and related practices (flexible workplace practices available and used, maternity and parental leaves and related issues), reciprocity (condition attached to FWPs that requires employees to work long hours in exchange for using FWPs), firm support (whether supervisors and/or colleagues support FWPs or are sympathetic to work-life challenges), firm barriers (expected and actual hours of work, negative career consequences if use FWPs), and the life course of individuals (employment and family transitions) (see e.g., Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Peper et al., 2009). Emergent themes from reading and re-reading these qualitative data were also coded; when these themes arose, previously coded data were re-coded in order to ensure consistency and reliability of the measurements. These emergent codes include other forms of reciprocity (employees use FWPs in exchange for (i) giving back time missed from work and/or (ii) completing their work tasks), management philosophy pertaining to work-life integration practices, and disappointment with confusion over FWPs or other HR benefits.

After the interviews, observational notes, and case study reports for each case were coded, a firm profile was written to develop a picture of a firm's FWPs and the life course transitions of its members. Data from the web-surveys regarding FWPs were added to these firm profiles. These contextual documents facilitated the comparison of multiple cases for the second phase of these analyses.

The FWPs that were available and used at each firm are analyzed and compared in Chapter 4. The web-survey and interview data included in the firm profiles are used to compare firms regarding the FWPs available and utilized and the accompanying workplace cultures. The relevant themes from the interview data include HR policies and practices, reciprocity, and firm support and barriers. A typology is established from the data which helps organize the content of each classification in order to understand complex inter-relations in the data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Cases placed within each type are not required to have parallel matches on every dimension but should reflect the dimensions that are particular to one classification over others (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Contrasting firms by type avoids assuming all organizations are either unique or the same, which are two trends in contemporary research on the sociology of organizations that some scholars consider limiting because neither approach helps develop theoretical explanations for variations among organizations (see Kalleberg et al., 1996; King et al., 2009). The simple typology that emerged from the data is used in Chapter 4 in relation to the characteristics of firms, owners, and employees in order to clarify the similarities and differences between firm types and give some indication of the influence of structured social relations.

The typology developed in Chapter 4 is used and referred to in subsequent chapters to further understand differences and similarities between cases; other theoretical based comparisons are made in these chapters. Chapter 5 examines potential sources of firm variation in relation to FWP. It focuses on the life course theme of the qualitative data that was described in the firm profiles. The coded text was re-read in order to draw out an employment pathway for each firm owner on a piece of paper. This pathway was marked with an owner's educational training and subsequent employment and educational transitions with corresponding dates. Family transitions and events were marked below this pathway according to the corresponding timeframe. These maps were helpful in comparing the life course patterns of owners in relation to whether their firm was flexible (results from previous analysis). Passages in the interview transcripts relating to the owners' experiences of employment and family transitions were subsequently compared. The relationships among family members in family-owned firms were also examined.

Chapter 6 examines the experiences of employees in these different firms. The firm profiles are used in this analysis; relevant themes from the interview data include HR policies and practices, reciprocity, firm barriers (time-related), and firm support (relations with others).

These analyses involve deduction to the extent that the research questions, themes, and propositions are derived from this dissertation's conceptual framework and the literature. But, the inferences and arguments are based on the patterns that emerge from the data. This co-existence of induction and deduction is consistent with Marshall's (1999) case study approach.

3.6 Limitations

The strong quality of data used in this dissertation is attributed to the larger WANE project itself. The research design, data collection, preliminary analysis, and data management of the project involved the collaboration of experienced international researchers. This dissertation, however, is not without limitations. Reliability and validity issues are addressed below.

A possible reliability concern is the construction of the themes used to code the qualitative data. As discussed earlier, they were derived from the literature and the data. Across firms, some themes were more prevalent than others; some variation, however, in respondents' experiences and lives across and within firms is expected. It was pointed out earlier that inconsistencies that emerge likely reflect the realities of individuals' lives and firms. The use of multiple data sources and perspectives for each case enhance the reliability of the picture gathered for each firm.

Sometimes reliability limitations occur when life course data are collected retrospectively (see Freeman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin, & Young-DeMarco, 1988; Henretta, 2003). The research questions, however, are about the timing of major transitions (e.g., becoming parents, prior employment transitions). These questions are cued in the interview by asking respondents about the chronological ordering of their interest in IT, their educational background, and places of employment prior to the current company. Although details of the experience are not always given or probed, the interviews provided an overall picture of a respondent's employment trajectory and the patterns within it.

A potential validity concern of this dissertation is the use of secondary qualitative data. Studying FWPs in the context of small firms was not the primary objective of the WANE project. The research themes of this dissertation, however, correspond to some of the themes of the larger research project; these areas include employment relations, life course transitions, and HR policy and practice.

Another validity issue relates to my contextual knowledge of each case or interview. Scholars consider this knowledge as imperative for accurate interpretation of the qualitative data (Marshall, 1999; Matthews, 2005). I was not present at the interviews. I did not witness the facial expressions, body language, or tone of voice regarding the particular area topics covered. I may interpret a passage as serious when respondents were actually sarcastic or joking. I also did not get a first-hand feel for the atmosphere of a firm; that is, how the owners and employees acted around each other. These limitations, however, are lessened because of the case study reports and my research assistant responsibilities. The case study reports were summaries on each firm that included observational notes. These reports were reviewed and written by the team members who conducted the interviews. As a research assistant I coded transcripts using a guideline for what themes were to be coded. Sometimes clarification was needed regarding the interpretation of certain passages. When these instances arose, I approached the project manager who was involved in the fieldwork. Further, I drew on the advice of my dissertation supervisor in assessments of the validity of my interpretations. She was the Principle Investigator and Canadian team leader of the WANE project and was extensively engaged in the fieldwork.

Chapter 4: Classifying Small Firms by their Flexibility for Employees

This chapter considers how small IT firms compare regarding the flexible workplace practices (FWPs) available and used by employees. Past research has shown that small firms are typically less likely to offer these practices compared to larger firms (see Comfort et al., 2003, for an exception) and that the likelihood of having access to FWPs is greater in larger firms than in smaller firms (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; ; Ferrer & Gagné, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2010; Kalleberg et al., 1996; Pitt-Catsoupes & Litchfield, 2001; Swanberg et al., 2005; Zeytinoglu et al., 2009).¹⁵ This difference holds whether FWPs are available formally or informally (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Pitt-Catsoupes & Litchfield, 2001). Formal FWPs are offered through a firm's Human Resource (HR) policies; they are detailed and typically available to all employees or, in some cases, to those in a particular unit. In contrast, informal FWPs are unofficial and involve undocumented negotiations between employees and their supervisors (Eaton, 2003; Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Pitt-Catsoupes & Litchfield, 2001; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004).

Based on the findings relating to firm size described above, we would expect to see very little in the way of FWPs in the current study. However, drawing on theories discussed in Chapter 2, two issues in particular challenge this expectation. First, the concept of responsible autonomy suggests that workers in highly skilled jobs will seemingly be given more autonomy over their work which, in turn, suggests that IT

¹⁵ Measurement of smaller enterprises varies in each study. Small firms employ less than 100 employees in Comfort et al. (2003). Small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employ under 500 workers in Dex and Scheibl (2001) and in Galinsky et al. (2010), small firm size is 1-49 (medium is 50-499 and large is 500 and over) in Pitt-Catsoupes and Litchfield (2001) and in Ferrer & Gagné, 2006, and under 25 (medium is 25-249 and large is 250 and up) in Swanberg, Pitt-Catsoupes, & Drescher-Burke (2005). SME size is unknown in the Pohlmann and Dulipovici (2004) study but according to the website of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), the organization that conducted the study, small firms employ under 50 people and mid-size firms employ between 50 and 499 people (combination = SME). The log number of employees is taken in Zeytinoglu et al. (2009) and in Kalleberg et al. (1996) to reduce the skew of larger firm sizes.

workers should have greater access to FWPs. Second, in small firms the owners presumably have greater influence in making decisions about how to manage and control their workforce. Owners' decisions in this regard will likely be based on past experiences and their experiences with others.

This chapter has four parts. In the first section the relative flexibility status of firms is determined. The second section compares the workplace cultures of firms and then presents a typology that groups together firms based on similarities in relation to their FWPs and accompanying workplace cultures (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The juxtaposition of different groups of firms facilitates the understanding of inter-relations in the data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) and developing theoretical explanations for variations among organizations (see Kalleberg et al., 1996; King et al., 2009). This typology is used in the third section of this chapter to compare variables that are indicative of whether structured social relations influenced the distribution of FWPs among study firms. The concluding section relates the typology and other comparisons made to the analyses in subsequent chapters.

4.1 Cross-Firm Comparisons of Flexible Workplace Practices

In this section, small firms are compared and then characterized as either flexible or inflexible for employees. The literature on FWPs does not often include comparisons across firms. Typically, past research involves either a quantitative analysis of individual-level data or a qualitative examination of a single large firm. Some guidelines can be taken from this past research. For instance, a consistent finding across studies is that a firm's flexibility cannot be determined solely on the availability of FWPs because they

are often unused (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Rapoport et al., 2002). The few studies that made cross-firm comparisons considered other workplace practices, such as gendered ideal behaviours, as the point of differentiation (see Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Peper et al., 2009). Classifying firms based on their FWPs is somewhat new territory. The multiple case study approach used in this thesis requires comparisons to be theoretical and contextual. Context based comparisons are facilitated by the multiple data sources used. I draw on case attributes from the web-survey data and rely on themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Theoretical based comparisons stem from the literature and the framework put forth in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2.2). The measures are discussed separately below before the overall assessments are revealed.

4.1.1 Presence of Flexible Workplace Practices: Formal Policies and Informal Negotiations

This cross-firm comparison begins with an assessment of whether FWPs exist formally and informally in the small firms studied, as well as which types of FWPs are available. These attributes are chosen because research consistently finds that in small firms, FWPs are more likely to be available to employees through informal negotiations than through formal HR policies (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Lewis & Cooper, 2005; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004). Informal practices are more prevalent in small firms, partly because these firms often lack formal HR departments and policies (Kalleberg et al., 1996; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004). As a result, owners and managers take responsibility for HR-related issues (Kalleberg et al., 1996; Pohlmann & Dulipovici,

2004). If there are variations across study firms in this regard, there will likely be theoretically important distinctions that can be made across the firms.

To assess whether formal and informal FWPs existed within firms, the case study reports and archival information, including HR policy booklets, were examined. As Table 4.1 shows, eight of 17 firms had formal HR policies but only in one case did a firm have HR policies that included FWPs. Yet, all firms had at least one FWP that was informally available to employees.

Table 4.1: The Presence of Flexible Workplace Practices through Formal HR Policies and Informal Negotiation across Firms

Case pseudonym	International case no.	HR policies	HR policies with FWPs	FWPs available informally
ComTech	117	Yes	Yes	Yes
Consyst	107	Yes	No	Yes
GP Solutions	108	Yes	No	Yes
SoftBytes	110	Yes	No	Yes
WebBytes	111	Yes	No	Yes
PSIT	114	Yes	No	Yes
IT Consulting	113	Yes	No	Yes
Interface Consulting	115	Yes	No	Yes
E&C Solutions	101	No	n/a	Yes
Net Host	102	No	n/a	Yes
Custom Software	103	No	n/a	Yes
FC Software	104	No	n/a	Yes
Biz Software	105	No	n/a	Yes
Online Design	106	No	n/a	Yes
A&S Systems	109	No	n/a	Yes
SysSolutions	112	No	n/a	Yes
Advanced Chips	116	No	n/a	Yes

SOURCE: WANE case study reports and archival data.

The types of FWPs available at firms are assessed through the web-survey data. Respondents were asked whether their employers provided certain non-salary benefits to them, including the availability of flexible working hours and the possibility of working

outside of the office (see Chapter 3 for the entire list of benefits). What flexible working hours specifically referred to was not defined in the questionnaire. The term suggests variability in the timing of when work is performed (e.g., flex-time) or in the amount of time spent performing work (e.g., reduced hours) (see Hill et al., 2008). Findings presented below are based on a ‘yes’ response from at least one respondent of the web-survey who worked at a particular firm (respondents included employees and owners of firms).

Flexible working hours were available in all but one firm (Biz Software), and the possibility to work from outside of the office on an occasional basis was available in all 17 firms. If this analysis only considered these findings and those illustrated in Table 4.1, all study firms could be described as flexible for their employees. Past research has shown, however, that even if FWPs are available in a firm, they are often unused (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Rapoport et al., 2002). Accordingly, whether FWPs were used is a better indication of a firm’s flexibility for employees. Based on this past research and the findings above, the availability of FWPs is not considered as a measure of a firm’s flexibility status in this study.

4.1.2 Types of Flexible Workplace Practices Used

This section examines the types of FWPs used across firms. The web-survey inquired about the use of FWPs through a question on whether respondents participated in special work arrangements. This question was presented earlier in Chapter 3 (see Table 3.1). Options included flex-time, compressed work-weeks (CWW), work-sharing

(reduced hours) in order to avoid lay-offs¹⁶, job-sharing (sharing a full-time job with another employee), and a retirement transition schedule (reduced hours); all of these FWP could be considered flexible working hours, which were available in all study firms. Additional FWPs (i.e., working from home) were captured through the option of other work arrangements. Findings for each firm are based on a 'yes' response from at least one respondent of the web-survey who worked at a particular firm (respondents included employees and owners of firms). Table 4.2 shows that in 11 firms, respondents used flex-time. This table also indicates that respondents used compressed work-weeks in three firms, work-sharing in order to avoid lay-offs in two firms, and other special work arrangements in five firms. Job-sharing and retirement transition schedules were not used and were excluded from the table.

In Table 4.2, firms are grouped together based on the range of different FWPs used by their employees for illustrative purposes. A lower range of different types of FWPs used indicates that a firm does not accommodate a variety of employee needs and circumstances, whereas a higher number indicates otherwise (Bailyn, 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002). It is possible that the range of FWPs used in a firm is influenced by the number of participants. To address this concern, the number of web-survey participants for each firm is illustrated in the third column. The first five firms listed in the table had the lowest range of FWPs used but not all had the lowest number of participants among firms. Also, the number of participants does not necessarily limit the range of FWPs that can be captured because FWPS are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Employees, for example, can work from home and have a flex-time schedule, or have a schedule with

¹⁶ Work-sharing may not reflect the definition of FWPs used in this study because workers may not choose this arrangement. I include it to keep together the options of special arrangements asked about in the web-survey.

Table 4.2: Types of Flexible Workplace Practices Used across Firms

Case pseudonym	Inter-national case no.	Number of web-survey respondents	Utilization of			
			flex-time	CWW	work sharing (reduced hours) in order to avoid lay-offs	other flexible work arrangements
E&C Solutions	101	5	No	No	No	No
Online Design	106	5	No	No	No	No
Net Host	102	4	No	No	No	No
Biz Software	105	2	No	No	No	No
Custom Software	103	2	No	No	No	No
WebBytes	111/9	10	No	No	No	Yes
FC Software	104	7	Yes	No	No	No
GP Solutions	108	4	Yes	No	No	No
ComTech	117	3	Yes	No	No	Yes
Interface Consulting	115	4	Yes	No	No	No
A&S Systems	109	4	Yes	No	No	No
SysSolutions	112	7	Yes	No	No	No
IT Consulting	113	6	Yes	No	No	No
Consyst	107	7	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
PSIT	114	8	Yes	No	Yes	No
Advanced Chips	116	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
SoftBytes	110	9	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

SOURCE: WANE web-survey data.

reduced weekly hours and use flex-time if full-time weekly hours were not required. In order for a more accurate comparison, further context for each firm is needed. Hence, I now turn to an assessment of the qualitative data.

4.1.3 The Range of Flexible Workplace Practices Used and the Associated Conditions

Whereas the web-survey asked about specific FWPs that were used personally by the respondent, the in-depth interviews asked open-ended questions about the firm's HR benefits and FWPs. Respondents discussed the FWPs used by themselves and their colleagues, supervisors, or subordinates. Respondents did not always use the label of flexibility. Descriptions of alternative work arrangements that involved changes to the timing or place of work, or the number of hours worked were considered FWPs in this analysis (see Hill et al., 2008). This approach enabled FWPs that are not identified in the web-survey to be included. Sick days, for example, were considered as FWPs by interview respondents. Small businesses are not legally obliged to give employees paid sick leave in Ontario and Alberta's Employment Standards Code does not include personal medical leave (see Appendix A). Hence, sick days are considered as a FWP in this dissertation. Interview data also reveals different contextual information because additional perspectives are included.

Table 4.3 illustrates the range of FWPs used at a firm that was identified from the interview data and compares it with the range from the web-survey data, which was taken from Table 4.2. I quantify qualitative data in the 4th column in order to illustrate that additional types of FWPs were identified.¹⁷ In one firm (Consyst), the qualitative data identified a lower number of FWPs compared to the quantitative data. Further investigation of the quantitative data revealed that one of the types of FWPs identified as being used at Consyst was only used by the owner and so caution is taken when interpreting the range of FWPs at this firm. As shown in Table 4.3, the range of FWPs

¹⁷ If over four FWPs were identified in the interview data, I listed '4+' in Table 4.3 because the web-survey had only four options of FWPs.

used among firms varied. I consider firms in which zero or one FWP(s) were used as relatively inflexible compared to firms in which three or more FWPs were used. Firms with two FWPs used, however, are more difficult to distinguish as either flexible or inflexible without further information about the context of each firm.

Table 4.3: The Range of Flexible Workplace Practices Used and the Associated Conditions

Case pseudonym	Inter-national case no.	Range of FWPs used (total #) from web-survey	Range of FWPs used (total #) from qualitative data	Conditions associated with the use of FWPs
E&C Solutions	101	0	1	owe-back-time; face-time
FC Software	104	1	1	owe-back-time
Consys	107	3	1	owe-back-time; face-time
WebBytes	111/9	1	1	owe-back-time
ComTech	117	2	2	owe-back-time; face-time
Net Host	102	0	3	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
Custom Software	103	0	2	get-work-done
Biz Software	105	0	2	get-work-done
Online Design	106	0	2	flexibility-for-flexibility
GP Solutions	108	1	2	get-work-done
A&S Systems	109	1	2	get-work-done
SoftBytes	110	3	4+	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
SysSolutions	112	1	2	flexibility-for-flexibility
IT Consulting	113	1	2	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
PSIT	114	2	3	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
Interface Consulting	115	1	4+	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
Advanced Chips	116	4	4+	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility

SOURCE: WANE web-survey and interview data.

Other uses of the qualitative data reveal more fruitful information to classify firms by their flexibility. An emergent finding from the qualitative data is that there were conditions attached to using FWPs among study firms. FWPs were not considered

entitlements that employees could use with no strings attached. These associated conditions are not independent of a firm's workplace culture but also cannot be separated from assessments of a firm's flexibility for employees. These conditions are informative about how FWP's are used in firms. Emerging research informs us that the use of FWP's on an informal basis is accompanied by employees doing something in return for their managers or employers (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Gonyea & Googins, 1996; Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Wharton, Chivers, & Blair-Loy, 2008). Among study firms, three particular conditions arose that had different implications for employees.

These forms of reciprocity are specified in Table 4.3 by terms that came from the interview data. The condition of "*owing back time*" required employees to work the actual time or presumed time missed from work as a result of using a FWP. Time presumed to be missed was arbitrarily decided upon by the owners or managers and involved the physical absence of workers from the office. The required presence at the office reflects the gendered ideal behaviour of face-time that was introduced in Chapter 2 as a practice reflective of both managerial control and a gendered workplace (Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Hochschild, 1997). Face-time conflicts with FWP's because these practices involve some time away from the workplace during the workday. These two conditions place limits on the time and place of work and hence, constrain the use of FWP's which involve changing the when, where and for how long work is performed (see Hill et al., 2008). The *owe-back-time* condition was evident in five firms, three of which also practiced face-time.

The remaining firms had other conditions attached to the use of FWP's. In exchange for the use of FWP's, employees must "*get their work done*" so that the firm

met its deadlines. Or, employees were required to “*be flexible*” for the firm by working long hours in the foreseeable future which for purposes of this dissertation is referred to as “*flexibility-for-flexibility*.” One of the two conditions was present in seven firms and both occurred in five firms. These two reciprocal exchanges are characterized by trust and are instances of responsible autonomy. FWPs can be considered as incentives that owners provide workers so they assume the interests and goals of the firm (see Friedman, 1977, 2000). Through these exchanges, workers are given autonomy in how they perform their day-to-day activities regarding when and where work will be completed (see MacEachen et al., 2008). As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, the use of FWPs by definition implies that some autonomy is given to workers. The conditions of *getting work done* and *flexibility-for-flexibility*, then, facilitate the use of FWPs because they involve giving workers some autonomy.

4.1.4 Classification of Firms by Relative Flexibility for Employees

The combination of the range of FWPs used and the implications of the associated conditions were considered for the overall assessment of firms’ flexibility. As shown in the previous section, applying the range of FWPs used as a measure of flexibility separated the firms with the highest and lowest ranges (three-to-four and zero-to-one, respectively) from one another. Additional information, however, was needed to determine the flexibility status of firms in which two kinds of FWPs were used. The conditions attached to the use of FWPs helped categorize these particular firms as either flexible or inflexible, and confirmed preliminary assessments based only on the low or high range of FWPs used. As discussed above, conditions that require employees to *owe*

back time and be present at the firm do not facilitate the use of FWPs, unlike the conditions of *getting work done* and *being flexible* to the firm. Accordingly, firms with two kinds of FWPs used were classified as inflexible and flexible depending on which condition(s) was present.

Based on the preceding analysis, two ideal types (Weber, 1978) of firms emerge in these data. First are the inflexible firms which I refer to as “Rigid firms.” Firms were inflexible if zero to two kinds of FWPs were used and this use had the associated conditions of *owing back time* to the firm and the presence of face-time. Into this classification fall the following firms: E&C Solutions, FC Software, Consyst, WebBytes, and ComTech. Second are the relatively flexible firms that I refer to as “Flexible firms.” Firms were considered flexible if at least two kinds of FWPs were used with the attached condition that employees *be flexible* and/or *get their work done*. Flexible firms include Net Host, Custom Software, Biz Software, Online Design, GP Solutions, A&S Systems, SoftBytes, SysSolutions, IT Consulting, PSIT, Interface Consulting, and Advanced Chips. The firms that fall into these two firm-types are grouped together in Table 4.3. The first five firms listed are Rigid firms, and the remaining 12 are Flexible firms. These labels do not appear in Table 4.3 but are used in Table 4.4 in the following section.

This classification of firms based on their flexibility suggests that FWPs are not often used in a straightforward way as entitlements that employees have the right to use (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Lewis & Cooper, 2005). Research indicates that workplace culture constrains or facilitates the use of available FWPs (Bailyn, 2006; Bond, 2004; Callan, 2007; Hochschild, 1997; Peper et al., 2009). Below, the workplace cultures of

Rigid firms and Flexible firms are assessed in order to determine whether particular workplace cultures accompany them.

4.2 Workplace Cultures and Flexible Workplace Practices

In the assessment below, firms are compared by their firm-type and workplace cultures that may affect the use of FWPs. For purposes of this study, I concentrate on one aspect of workplace culture that captures the shared knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs with respect to working time. Measurements of this working time include the typical hours of work per week, the occurrence of overtime hours of work (often, occasionally, or rarely), and reciprocal exchanges for using FWPs. Forms of reciprocity were introduced earlier as conditions attached to using FWPs and include employees *owing the firm back time*, *being flexible back to the firm*, and *getting work done*. These exchanges are reflective of the rules management established about when and where work should be performed. This analysis considers overtime as the hours worked in excess of a nine hour day; working late at night or on weekends, for example, are instances of overtime unless an employee was scheduled to work regular hours during these times.¹⁸ These measures are indicative of the behaviours and rules regarding when and where work is and should be performed.

Past research informs us that workplace cultures are unsupportive of the use of FWPs if employees are required to work long hours of work, perceive negative consequences their individual careers if they use FWPs, and have managers who do not accommodate the use of FWPs or employees' work-life balance (Andreassi & Thompson,

¹⁸ The Ontario and Alberta employment regulatory acts consider overtime as any hours over 44 hours each week (Province of Alberta, 2010; Service Ontario, 2000) See Appendix A for a summary of these regulations.

2008; Blair-Loy, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). These dimensions were discussed in Chapter 2. In this analysis, a workplace culture is considered to facilitate the use of FWP if the number of hours employees work per week are not excessive (over 44 hours), employees do not often work overtime hours of work, and reciprocal exchanges of *being flexible back to the firm* or *getting work done* are present. Workplace cultures that do not reflect these dimensions do not facilitate the use of FWPs. This time and place dimension of workplace culture closely relates to how FWPs are understood in this study. Ergo, Rigid and Flexible firms are expected to have different workplace cultures in this regard.

Table 4.4 compares the workplace cultures with respect to working time of Rigid firms and Flexible firms based on the dimensions described in the previous paragraph. The average hours worked per week by employees in Rigid firms varied somewhat. Hours were frequently long for employees in two of the firms, whereas employees in the other three Rigid firms had more reasonable hours of work per week although they worked overtime occasionally. All five Rigid firms worked on the basis of employees *owing back time* in exchange for the use of FWPs. Face-time was an ideal behaviour that accompanied this condition in three Rigid firms. Rigid firms' consideration of employees *owing the firm back time* in exchange for using FWPs constrained the use of FWPs. For instance at ComTech, employees were required to be present at the firm during the hours of 10am to 4pm, which in turn contradicted with the FWP option of working from home that was offered formally through their HR policies. The reciprocal exchanges in Rigid firms are time-oriented and reflect the owners' mistrust of their employees. The owners' direct controlling strategies contrast with the responsible autonomy strategy that is often

promoted and found in knowledge-intensive firms, like in the IT industry (see Chapter 2).

This finding will be discussed and elaborated on further in subsequent chapters.

Table 4.4: The Workplace Culture Dimensions of Rigid and Flexible Firms

Case pseudonym by firm-type	Inter-national case no.	Average number of hours per week (mean)	Occurrence of overtime hours worked (often, occasionally or rarely)	Forms of reciprocity present (conditions associated with the use of FWPs)
Rigid firms				
E&C Solutions	101	50.4	Often	owe-back-time face-time
FC Software	104	49.3	Often	owe-back-time
Consyst	107	44.1	Occasional	owe-back-time face-time
WebBytes	111/9	42.9	Rare	owe-back-time
ComTech	117	43	Occasional	owe-back-time face-time
Flexible firms				
Net Host	102	46.8	Often	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
Custom Software	103	35.0	Rare	get-work-done
Biz Software	105	38.5	Rare	get-work-done
Online Design	106	42.7	Often	flexibility-for-flexibility
GP Solutions	108	41.5	Rare	get-work-done
A&S Systems	109	37.8	Rare	get-work-done
SoftBytes	110	43.4	Occasional	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
SysSolutions	112	47.9	Often	flexibility-for-flexibility
IT Consulting	113	45.1	Occasional	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
PSIT	114	37.3	Occasional	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
Interface Consulting	115	41.4	Occasional	get-work-done flexibility-for-flexibility
Advanced Chips	116	44.2	Rare	get-work-done

SOURCE: Average hours per week are from the web-survey data. Overtime hours and reciprocity are from the interview data.

Table 4.4 reveals variation among Flexible firms with regard to the occurrence of overtime hours and the reciprocal exchanges that take place for the use of FWPs. Most

striking are the differences based on the regularity of overtime. According to the literature recently reviewed above, this case attribute has implications for employees' experiences of FWPs. Hence, I classify Flexible firms as having workplace cultures that are either "favourable" or "contradictory" to the use of FWPs. Three firms are considered Flexible/contradictory and include Online Design, Net Host, and SysSolutions. In these firms, overtime hours were frequently worked by employees. The remaining nine firms are classified as Flexible/favourable because overtime hours were occasionally-to-rarely worked. These firms include Custom Software, Biz Software, GP Solutions, A&S Systems, SoftBytes, IT Consulting, PSIT, Interface Consulting, and Advanced Chips. The workplace cultures of Flexible/favourable firms had a more balanced view of individuals' working and non-working lives compared to Flexible/contradictory firms.

The preceding two analyses have revealed three firm-types that emerged from the data based on firms' flexibility and workplace cultures with respect to working time. These firm-types include Rigid, Flexible/contradictory, and Flexible/favourable firms. I now turn to examine the characteristics across these types.

4.3 The Characteristics of Firms, Owners, and Employees across Firm-Types

In order to gain a clearer picture of the different firms identified above, I compare the characteristics of the firms, owners, and employees across the firm-types. The conceptual framework of this dissertation indicates that FWPs are intangible resources and that their distribution across different firms may be structured by class, age, gender, and/or race/ethnic relations (see Figure 2.2; McMullin, 2010). The sample composition of

the small firm owners and employees in each firm type gives some insight into whether structured social relations influenced this distribution.

4.3.1 Firm Characteristics

Firm characteristics of the sample were presented in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3 and are compared across firm types in Table 4.5. Table 4.5 shows little variation in firm characteristics among Rigid, Flexible/contradictory, and Flexible/favourable firms. I discuss the results in detail below. Notably, these firms-types did not differ based on their location (Ottawa, London, and Calgary).

The mean size of firms was higher for Rigid firms compared to the two kinds of Flexible firms. But, this differentiation narrowed when the median size of the firms is considered. The range of sizes shows that the lowest firm size differed among the firms and skewed the mean. The ages of the firms varied somewhat, but it was not clear that the oldest firms were either the most flexible or inflexible firms. Flexible/contradictory firms, however, were all in operation for 10 or less years.

Most study firms specialized in software or web development but a few were consulting firms. Two of the three consulting firms were Flexible/favourable firms. Perhaps in consulting IT firms, owners were motivated to employ responsible autonomy strategies in order to retain their skilled and knowledgeable employees (Clear & Dickson, 2005; Frenkel et al., 1995; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). This suggestion leads me to make further comparisons based on the skill set required of employees in each firm (not illustrated in Table 4.5). Firms that generated business by responding to the needs of clients performed various tasks that required general skills among employees. Specific

skills were required when firms specialized in web design, gaming, and consulting or performed custom or specific programming for their niche in the market; consulting was considered a specific skill set because firms relied on knowledgeable employees in order to problem-solve efficiently and effectively. With the exception of consulting, no differences occurred across firms in their required skill set. This finding suggests that consulting IT firms may be unique regarding their motivations to keep retention high among their knowledge workers. Caution needs to be heeded because of the small number of consulting firms.

Table 4.5: Firm Characteristics across Rigid and Flexible Firms

Firm characteristics	Rigid firms	Flexible and contradictory firms	Flexible and favourable firms
Firm size			
Mean	15	10	10
Median	12	10	11
Range	11-21	6-14	4-17
Firm age			
<5	-	1	3
5-10	2	2	2
11-20	3	-	3
21 and up	-	-	1
Firm specialization			
Software/web development	4	3	6
Systems analysis/support	-	-	1
Consulting/business	1	-	2
Family ownership status			
Family-owned	2	1	2
Not Family-owned	3	2	7
Total number of firms	5	3	9

SOURCE: WANE snapshots, case studies, and interview data.

The last firm characteristic compared in Table 4.5 was family ownership. The five family-owned firms in this study varied across firm-types. Hence, this characteristic was

not a source of variation for firms' relative flexibility status. Comparisons across family-owned firms are made in Chapter 5 in order to determine why some were Rigid and others were Flexible.

In the next two sections, I compare the characteristics of owners and employees of the study firms. Recall from Chapter 3 that the sample used in this dissertation mostly included white, younger (median= 37 years), highly educated men; this profile is reflective of the IT industry itself (see Gunderson et al., 2005). This homogeneity should be kept in mind in the following comparisons to note any variations from the total sample.

4.3.2 Characteristics of Owners

Characteristics of the firm owners by firm-type are illustrated in Table 4.6. This table shows many similarities with regard to ethnicity, age, and gender. None of the firm owners were members of a visible minority. Table 4.6 shows that many of the firm owners were older, diverging from the average profile of the sample given in Chapter 3. Most Rigid firm owners (7 of 9) and Flexible/favourable firm owners (14 of 21) were at least in their 40s. In the IT industry, workers who are at least 40 years old are considered older (McMullin & Duerden Comeau, 2011). In contrast, the Flexible/contradictory firm owners were the youngest owners of the study.

Eight of the 36 firm owners of this study were women. These women owned Rigid, Flexible/contradictory, and Flexible/favourable firms. Just over one-fifth of Flexible/favourable firm owners and Rigid firm owners were women. If the two kinds of Flexible firms are combined, the percentage remains the same (about 22 percent). The

presence of women in power does not inherently undermine or support gendered work arrangements (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Reskin et al., 1999). Variation, however, emerges when the 10 owners of family-owned firms were omitted. The remaining women were all owners of Flexible/favourable firms. This finding suggests that the gender of owners in firms that were not family-owned influenced the distribution of FWP for employees. These women were in positions of power and could effectively establish alternative work arrangements that were not necessarily gendered. It should be noted that in these firms, women were not the sole owners.

Highest educational attainment is included as a variable in Table 4.6 because it is somewhat indicative of an individual's class position and the attitudes or ideologies held regarding the statuses of women and men. Individuals who hold traditional gender ideologies tend to have lower levels of education, whereas individuals who hold liberal attitudes or ideologies tend to have higher levels of education (Beaujot & Ravanera, 2003; Greenstein, 1995; Hochschild, 1989/2003; Schoon, Cheng, Gale, Batty, Deary, 2009). Liberal orientations reflect an egalitarian division of labour whereby men and women equally assume both family and work responsibilities; traditional orientations reflect the presumptions that women are better suited for familial responsibilities and men are better suited for paid work responsibilities (Beaujot & Ravanera, 2003). Table 4.6 reveals that a majority of Flexible/favourable firm owners had at least a Bachelor's Degree (81 percent). In comparison, half of the Rigid firm owners and none of the Flexible/contradictory firm owners had a Bachelor's Degree.

These findings suggest a connection between the educational attainment of owners and the likelihood that they accommodated workers' non-working lives. Those

Table 4.6: Characteristics of Owners across Rigid and Flexible Firms

Characteristics of owners	Rigid firms		Flexible and contradictory firms		Flexible and favourable firms	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Race/Ethnicity						
Visible minorities	-	-	-	-	-	-
Immigrants	-	-	-	-	-	-
Age						
20s	-	-	3	50	-	-
30s	2	22.2	1	16.7	7	33.3
40s	2	22.2	1	16.7	11	52.4
50s	5	55.6	-	-	2	10
60s	-	-	1	16.7	1	4.8
Median (in years)	Late 40s to early 50s ¹		33	-	43	-
Range (in years)	33-58	-	27-62	-	30-60	-
Gender						
Women	2	22.2	1	16.7	5	23.8
Women in firms not family-owned	-	-	-	-	3	17.6
Educational attainment						
High School	2	22.2	5	83.3	2	10
College Diploma	3	33.3	1	16.7	2	10
Bachelor's Degree	4	44.4	-	-	8	38.1
Master's Degree	-	-	-	-	8	38.1
Doctorate Degree	-	-	-	-	1	4.8
Industry of previous position						
IT	2	22.2	5	83.3	16	76.2
Other (not IT)	7	77.8	1	16.7	5	23.8
Total number of firm owners	9	-	6	-	21	-

SOURCE: WANE interview data.

NOTE: ¹ A range is given because the exact age of some owners was not provided.

with higher levels of education were more likely than those with lower levels of education to facilitate the use of FWPs. The prevalence of highly educated owners of Flexible/favourable firms indicates that the women who were owners of these firms had co-owners who were supportive of alternative workplace practices. The relatively high

educational attainment of Flexible/favourable firm owners is not indicative of their IT-related skills because this education was not always in computer science (Adams & Demaiter, 2010).

The final characteristic of firm owners compared in Table 4.6 is the industry their previous occupational position was situated in. Recent experience in IT may be telling of any exposure to the management control strategy of responsible autonomy. Recall from Chapter 2 that responsible autonomy strategies are considered the best way to manage workers in knowledge-intensive industries such as IT (Clear & Dickson, 2005; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). Responsible autonomy facilitates creativity and enables workers to have some leeway in their day-to-day activities (Frenkel et al., 1995; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). Table 4.6 shows that a minority of Rigid firm owners had recently worked in the IT industry (22 percent). Conversely, the previous position of the majority of Flexible/contradictory (83 percent) and Flexible/favourable (76 percent) firm owners was in the IT industry. Firm owners whose previous position was not in the IT industry also did not previously work in a different knowledge-intensive industry. The different industries Rigid and Flexible firm owners worked in prior to their current positions seem to be related to the management control strategies they adopted.

4.3.3 Characteristics of Employees

Table 4.7 shows some variation based on the ethnicity and ages of employees across firm-types. The few visible minorities and/or immigrants in the sample tended to be employed at Flexible/favourable firms. These ethnic categories were not mutually exclusive. Of the six immigrants working at Flexible/favourable firms, four were

members of a visible minority. This finding is indicative of the relative diversity of employees of Flexible/favourable firms.

The distribution, range, and average of the ages of employees across firm-types are illustrated in Table 4.7. The employees of Flexible/favourable firms were relatively older (median= 40 years) compared to the employees of Flexible/contradictory firms (median= 28 years) and the employees of Rigid firms (median= 30 years). These differences in age composition of employees are informative in relation to the firms' flexibility statuses and typical hours of work. The relative inflexibility of Rigid firms and the long hours often worked in Flexible/contradictory firms may be influenced or reinforced by the younger ages of their employees. Younger workers are expected to be able and/or willing to work long hours because of their energy and lack of responsibilities outside of the workplace (Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011). Because they are presumed to lack personal responsibilities, the need for FWPs is presumably absent. The older employees at Flexible/favourable firms were not protected from experiencing work-life conflict given that overtime occurred occasionally in many of these firms (see Table 4.4). Their greater presence at Flexible/favourable firms, however, may mean that older workers sought out these firms or that the firms responded to the work-life needs of older workers. This idea will be drawn out in Chapter 6.

Little variation occurred across firm-types based on the gender composition of employees. Flexible/favourable and Rigid firms had about a similar proportion of women working for them. Of the total number of individuals employed, 23 percent and 25 percent of employees at Rigid and Flexible/favourable firms, respectively, were women. Few women worked at Flexible/contradictory firms (eight percent). Recall that gender

Table 4.7: Characteristics of Employees across Rigid and Flexible Firms

Characteristics of employees	Rigid firms		Flexible and contradictory firms		Flexible and favourable firms ¹	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Race/Ethnicity²						
Visible minorities	2	3	-	-	6	8.7
Immigrants	-	-	-	-	6	8.7
Age³						
<20	-	-	1	5.3	-	-
20s	17	42.5	11	57.9	5	12.8
30s	13	32.5	5	26.3	14	35.9
40s	9	22.5	2	10.5	14	35.9
50s	1	2.5	-	-	5	12.8
60s	-	-	-	-	1	2.6
Range (in years)	23-49	-	19-43	-	28-62	-
Median (in years)	30	-	28	-	40	-
Gender²						
Women	15	22.7	2	8.3	17	24.6
Women in firms not family-owned	7	12.1	2	12.5	16	23.5
Educational attainment³						
High School	2	5.0	3 ⁴	15.8	1	2.6
College Diploma	19	47.5	12	63.2	13	33.3
Bachelor's Degree	16	40	4	21.1	22	56.4
Master's Degree	3	7.5	-	-	3	7.5
Total number of employees interviewed	40	-	19	-	39	-
Total number of individuals employed at firms ⁵	66	-	24	-	69	-

SOURCE: WANE case studies, snapshots, and interview data.

NOTES: ¹Two respondents were excluded because they were former employees of a firm. ²Data are based on the case studies and snapshots. Not all individuals have been interviewed. ³Data are based on the interview data. ⁴Two of these respondents were in college at the time of interviews. ⁵This number is derived from the addition of all firm sizes indicated from the snapshots and then subtracting the number of owners, who were included in the firm sizes.

differences emerged earlier with the removal of family-owned firms. A similar result occurs with respect to the composition of employees. Twelve percent of employees were women in Rigid firms, whereas 24 percent of employees were women in Flexible/favourable firms; the number of women employed in Flexible/contradictory

firms remained the same but the proportion rose to 13 percent with the omission of family-owned firms. The effect of family-owned firms is unclear at this point and will be considered in the subsequent chapter. In the industry, the occurrence of higher turnover rates of employees who are women compared to men has been attributed to the intense workloads and long hours of work (Perrons, 2003). Flexible/favourable firms seemed like a more desirable workplace for women compared to the other firms. This idea will be examined further in Chapter 6.

Table 4.7 also illustrates little variation across firms regarding their highest level of educational attainment. These employees were highly educated.

4.3.4 Summary Remarks

In the last section I compared the typology developed earlier in this chapter by characteristics of the firms, owners, and employees. The aim was to determine the influence of firm and structural factors on the distribution of FWP across firms. Guided by the conceptual framework of this dissertation, the analyses performed here touched upon the interaction of structured social relations of class, age, gender, and ethnicity/race and the distribution of resources. Firm-specific characteristics did not vary much among the firm-types, with the exception of firms that specialized in consulting. On average, Flexible/favourable firms had more owners and employees who were women and who were relatively older (40 years and over) compared with Flexible/contradictory and Rigid firms, controlling for family-owned firms. Flexible/favourable firm owners also had greater levels of educational attainment and recent experience in the IT industry. These particular profiles of owners and employees are indicative of the structural processes

influencing access to FWPs. These factors will be teased out in subsequent analyses in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.4 Application of the Flexible Workplace Practices and Workplace Culture

Typology

This chapter assessed the flexibility for employees in each study firm and separated the relatively inflexible cases from the relatively flexible cases. The use of multiple sources of data facilitated obtaining a holistic understanding of a firm's FWPs; how many types or the range of FWPs that were available and used, and what conditions were attached to use FWPs were measures used in this cross-firm analysis. I referred to the relatively inflexible firms as Rigid firms and the relatively flexible as Flexible firms. I examined the working time aspect of firm's workplace culture and found that those in Rigid and Flexible firms contrasted each other; typically, the working behaviours and rules in Flexible firms were characterized by trust and were supportive of the use of FWPs. Variation, however, occurred among Flexible firms with respect to the frequency of overtime for employees. Firms where employees often worked long hours were referred to as Flexible/contradictory; firms where employees did not work long hours often were referred to as Flexible/favourable.

The typology of study firms that emerged from data in this chapter facilitates subsequent analyses. Chapter 5 considers potential sources of a firm's relative flexibility for employees and Chapter 6 examines employees' experiences of FWPs. The juxtaposition of firms presented in this chapter provides a useful guide to compare firms that have similar flexibilities for employees. For each analysis, firms that fall into the

same classification (Rigid firms, Flexible/contradictory firms, or Flexible/favourable firms) will be examined in order to see if similar patterns emerge. If they do, then firms are grouped together in their respective firm-type which provides more information for contrasting Rigid firms and the two kinds of Flexible firms. Comparing these ideal types facilitates theoretical explanations for variation among organizations and overcomes the presumption that all firms are either the same or unique (see King et al., 2009). This thesis aims to understand the patterns that emerged among firms. Cases that are exceptions will not be examined separately because research is not typical on how small IT firms compare with regard to their FWPs. Notably, a firm's place in the typology means that they match the dimensions that are particular to one firm-type over others. These exceptions are noted in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5: Sources of Rigid and Flexible Firms

This chapter uses the typology of firms developed in Chapter 4 and seeks to identify and understand the sources of variation among firm-types. The conceptual framework of this dissertation highlights many potential factors that underlie flexible workplace practices (FWPs) and accompanying workplace cultures with respect to working time (see Figure 2.2). The life course dimensions of this framework have yet to be examined in the literature as potential contributing factors of flexibility for employees.

Applying the timing of lives or life stage concept to this analysis leads one to explore how owners' prior experiences and transitions affect owners' circumstances and behaviours in their current positions, specifically how they develop FWPs at their respective firms (see Elder et al., 2003; George, 1993; Marshall & Mueller, 2003). Owners' lives are lived in context and, hence, structural forces cannot be ignored in this analysis. Owners confront structured social relations that are embedded in the domain of work, in both their current and previous occupational positions, and negotiate them in ways that conform to or resist hegemonic expectations. The sample profiles of each firm-type from Chapter 4 are indicative of structured social relations and are incorporated into the analysis of this chapter (see Tables 4.5 to 4.7).

The study firms operate in the Information Technology (IT) industry, an exemplar industry of the new economy (Duerden Comeau, 2003) where the managerial control strategy of responsible autonomy is typical (James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Richardson, 2009). As noted in Chapter 2, this strategy requires managers to resist the class presumption that workers will disrupt the labour process without the intervention of the managers. This industrial context, as well as the dominance of gender ideologies in

the world of work that were discussed in Chapter 2, lead us to expect that study firms would be organized in the ways described in the literature. Although many firms were organized in these ways, hegemonic class expectations were conformed to in some firms and gendered expectations were blurred in other firms. As this chapter will show, this variation occurred because of the firm owners' different past experiences and preferred management control strategies.

The first section below discusses these potential contributing factors by each firm-type separately. The family and employment pathways of the owners were examined in relation to their respective firms' relative flexibility and workplace cultures with respect to working time. Patterns emerged in the recent employment transitions and past work experiences of Flexible and Rigid firm owners. Little variation occurred with respect to their family pathways but some differences will be noted throughout this chapter. The last section of this chapter examines the linked lives among family members in the family-owned firms of this study in an attempt to understand why these particular firms varied in their relative flexibility for employees.

5.1 Rigid Firms

As noted previously, Rigid firms include E&C Solutions, FC Software, Consyst, WebBytes, and ComTech. In these firms, few FWPs or none were used by employees. Rigid firms were time-oriented whereby owners monitored workers' hours of work and presence at the office (face-time). Typical hours of work per week varied for employees of these firms (see Table 4.4). Under these circumstances, the use of FWPs was consequently constrained (Hochschild, 1997; Højgaard, 1998; Lewis & Smithson, 2009).

Below, I discuss the characteristics by which Rigid firm owners differed from Flexible/favourable firm owners. These characteristics are suggestive of how the lives of Rigid firm owners are structured in particular ways. The owners' previous and current employment experiences are then presented in relation to the FWPs and working time behaviours and rules of Rigid firms.

5.1.1 Education, Gender Ideologies, and Recent Work History

It was illustrated in the previous chapter that generally, Rigid firm owners were less likely to have a university degree, to have worked in IT in their position prior, and to be female or have female employees compared to Flexible/favourable firms. Educational attainment and gender composition are variables suggestive of whether Rigid firm owners conform to dominant gender ideologies that were discussed in Chapter 2. Typically, the presence of women in the workplace does not make it an equitable one (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Reskin et al., 1999). But, the differences between Rigid and Flexible/favourable firms suggest that the male dominance in Rigid firms reflects their preference for men in powerful positions. The firm owners in this study did not widely express their personal views; however, how they negotiated gender relations is implied through the ways that they manage in their firms. These descriptions are revealed shortly in relation to their employment experiences.

Where Rigid firm owners worked prior to their current ownership position varied with the exception that most were not working in IT (78 percent). Of the two that previously worked in IT, one owned a small firm and the other was employed at a large firm. Rigid firm owners described their previous employment experiences in scant

amount of detail but references to their current experiences were made that are telling of their management control strategies and negotiation of gender and age relations. Their experiences are illustrated below in relation to their firms' FWPs and workplace cultures with respect to working time.

5.1.2 Employment Experiences and Current Firm Organization

Like other Rigid firm owners, an owner of FC Software described his employment pathway by merely naming places where he was employed. He was a tradesperson and worked at large companies until he started his current company with his wife. Prior to FC Software, his wife did not participate in the labour force; she was a full-time homemaker while their children were young until the youngest was an older teenager. Before then she worked as a programmer at a large company; she did not elaborate on this experience. Some insight can be gained into how they managed their employees through the husband's description of FC Software's HR policies. He commented:

We have written policies ... There's policies about, you know, dress code, there's policies about office politics, talking to the customers, [and] there's policies about doing [work], especially in the development side ... [about] coding concepts.
(1104016, male, early 50s, IT sales/marketing)

FC Software was one of the three Rigid firms that had HR policies; eight of 17 firms in the sample had HR policies, which is unusual for small firms (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Kalleberg et al., 1996; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004). When asked if there were reporting hierarchies at FC Software, the owner said "nope." But when probed if employees felt that they could come to him with any sort of issue, he replied:

I think there are some people [who] are still shy. They look at the position that [my wife] or I have and feel like, you know, we're still of authority which is fine. You don't want to change that too much. (1104016, male, early 50s, IT sales/marketing)

His comments suggest that the "authority" used in this small firm extended beyond the entrepreneurial control that small firm owners are presumed to have over the work activities that workers perform (Edwards, 1979). The establishment of control is touched upon by other Rigid firm owners below.

An owner of WebBytes commented on the hierarchy in his small firm. He said, "It's just disappointing to me that you know I'm ... perceived as the CEO. I just can't be one of the people on the team" (1191016, male, age unknown, CEO). He did not speak about authority like the FC Software owner previously did, but noted that being considered the boss was "unavoidable" given his ownership position. Prior to his current position he worked at a not-for-profit organization and his fellow owner worked at a large public organization; neither owner held IT-related positions at these companies. This particular owner claimed that he and his partner "hate[d] hierarchies" and wanted a "utopic corporation ... [that] doesn't have rules." Utopia, however, was not present at WebBytes and hegemonic class relations were reproduced.

The CEO of E&C Solutions was one of the two Rigid firm owners who owned a different small firm prior to his current position; the company he previously owned did not operate in the IT industry. He commented on this experience:

In my old company...I feel like I got too close to the staff. [When this happens] you run the risk when there [are] tough decisions to make. You can't let people go because you know their family and you've been to their home. ... [With] this company, I try to stay a little bit more separated from the staff so that [I] can make sound business decisions. (1101029, male, 53 yrs, CEO)

One way he kept his distance from employees was delegating the power to manage them to a project manager. He described her management style as being in contrast to his preference. “To me management is about nurturing people ... She tends to go, if you don’t hit that perfection mark, you need to die.” He claimed he told her that she tended to “eat [her] young” and advised her to be softer in her approach to employees. Although he criticized her heavy-handedness, he did not appear to want to intervene. This firm differed from other study firms because a manager decided whether employees could use FWP’s without consulting the owners. Nonetheless this hierarchy parallels the formalized power differences found in other Rigid firms. The loose organization of work that is typically characteristic of IT firms (Benner, 2002; Ranson, 2003) and the simple unstructured forms of control presumed to exist in small firms (Edwards, 1979) contrast the structure of Rigid firms, as revealed by the owners above. Rigid firm owners seemed to mistrust their employees to work productively or in the firm’s interests. Ergo, these owners preferred more direct strategies than responsible autonomy, unlike many firms in IT (James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Richardson, 2009). This finding will be elaborated on and discussed further in Chapter 7.

Although organized in similar ways as other Rigid firms, the two owners of ComTech had split views about how to manage their employees. This difference of opinion may be tied to their past employment experiences. The CTO recently worked for a large IT company, whereas the CEO owned a small business that specialized in business consulting and operated outside of the IT industry. The CTO commented on his experiences in relation to ComTech:

The atmosphere ... that we’ve wanted [at ComTech] has been you know an open one, an exciting one ... [with] a funky cool feel as opposed to a button-down

corporate feel. I've worked in those environments ... We really [do] not want ... that same environment. (1117084, male, 33 yrs, City A)

The CTO worked in large IT companies throughout his employment trajectory. He did not elaborate further on these experiences.

The CEO had experience working at a large IT company, although this employment was in the distant past when he was a young graduate. He briefly commented on this experience:

I ... made all sorts of strategic changes within the company which they certainly looked at pretty fondly ... I was getting some pretty good recognition. But you know actually getting ... the adoption of some of those recommendations out there to the organization as a whole was really difficult. I just wanted to do something where my contributions had ... [an] immediate impact. (1117175, male, 36 yrs, City B)

At the time he made his recommendations, he was young and new to the company and the industry; his input was not likely valued further up the company's pecking order. Despite feeling unappreciated by his previous large employer, he valued how it and other large companies operated. Recall from Chapter 4 that ComTech was the only study firm whose HR policies included FWPs (see Table 4.1). Their current HR policies were originally established for a large organization that did not operate in IT. This large organization employed the CEO's wife. This connection is an example of linked lives, which posits that individuals' lives occur in tandem and are interdependent. The work experience of his wife influenced how the CEO carried out his work activities as a small business owner.

The esteem held by the CEO of ComTech for large companies became clearer when he spoke of ComTech's HR structure.

I've been talking to a lot of my friends who work at some big companies. ... They basically have an all encompassing vacation policy. You get 'x' number of weeks

[off] and that's it. ... Whether you want to be sick, whether you have dentist appointments, whether you want to take [a] vacation, [it] doesn't matter, that's your time off. And while our CTO disagrees with that policy, I think [it] is probably the least tenuous way ... and the most equitable. (1117175, male, 36 yrs, City B)

The CTO also commented on this difference of opinion:

We've had a bit of disagreement ... about the level of flexibility over things, like working from home and [working] times and so on. Some of it [is] personality-related and some of it [is] just being concern[ed] over ... maintaining that structure and discipline that everyone adheres to. (1117084, male, 33 yrs, City A)

ComTech's classification as a Rigid firm implies that the CTO conceded to the CEO's preference. Despite the CEO's presumption, however, a one-size-fits-all policy is not equitable because it does not respect the different preferences, circumstances, and needs of employees (see Davies, 1996; Perrons et al., 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002).

The current employment experiences of Rigid firm owners involve long hours of work. Most of them worked heroic hours, over 50 or 60 hours per week. A co-owner of FC Software was the only exception; she was the CEO's wife and mainly performed the business's administrative duties. The CTO of ComTech commented on the consequence of long hours. He said:

I don't see [my kids] as much as I would like to, and in part that's because I have a lot of work to do. ... My responsibilities extend not only to my children but also to all the employees here. (1117084, male, 33 yrs, City A).

He was able to prioritize his work life because his wife was the primary caregiver of their young children. His comment reflects the circumstances of the other Rigid firm owners who treated work as their sole priority in life regardless of whether they have young children. Their consideration of personal life as secondary to work may be indicative of the inflexibility of their firms and their tendency to reproduce traditional gendered and age expectations. According to some scholars, lacking personal experience of work-

family challenges may explain why some supervisors are unsupportive of FWPs (Hochschild, 1997; Kanter, 1977). This idea becomes more evident in subsequent sections of this chapter.

5.2 Flexible Firms

Recall from Chapter 4 that there are two kinds of Flexible firms in this study. For the purposes of this dissertation, these firms are referred to as Flexible/favourable and Flexible/contradictory. As noted previously, Flexible/favourable firms include Custom Software, Biz Software, GP Solutions, A&S Systems, SoftBytes, IT Consulting, PSIT, Interface Consulting, and Advanced Chips. These two kinds of Flexible firms differed somewhat in their firm characteristics and sample profiles (see Tables 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7), but the firm owners had similar employment experiences and hence are discussed together. This section begins by reviewing some of these differences, and then describes the owners' past employment experiences. Comparisons to Rigid firms and differences between Flexible firms are noted throughout.

5.2.1 Firm Characteristics

Firm-types did not differ much in their firm characteristics but there are a couple unique to Flexible firms. The number of years that firms had been in operation was less for Flexible/contradictory firms compared to Flexible/favourable and Rigid firms (see Table 4.5). One may presume that small firms with few years of experience overload on clients and business in an attempt to become established. Study firms, however, were not start-up firms in their first year of operation, a time when such measures are presumably

taken. Although not start-ups, Flexible/contradictory firms may still be in the stage of ironing out inconsistencies between their FWPs and working time behaviours and rules. It is also possible that differences in the years of operation may be inconsequential.

Another characteristic on which firms differed slightly was their specialization. Most firms specialized in software or web development, and systems analysis or support (see Table 4.5). Two of the three consulting firms were Flexible/favourable firms. Consulting firms may rely heavily on their skilled employees and thus, may have different retention concerns compared to firms with other specializations (Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). Trusting employees and facilitating their work-life balance are ways to attract and retain staff of all ages (Lowe, 2000; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). Accordingly, consulting firms in this study may be inclined to accommodate employees' needs through FWPs.

5.2.2 Education, Gender Ideologies, and Recent Work History

The differences in highest educational attainment and gender composition between Rigid and Flexible/favourable firm owners has already been reviewed. Presumably, Flexible/favourable firm owners hold more liberal or non-traditional views of women in the workplace. In comparison, Flexible/contradictory firm owners had the lowest educational attainment relative to other firm owners. Among the six Flexible/contradictory firm owners, one had a college diploma (17 percent) and five had a high school diploma (88 percent) as their highest educational attainment. Their lower education may be accompanied by traditional gendered views in the workplace. Recall from the previous chapter that in Flexible/contradictory firms, there was a high frequency

of overtime and a large absence of women. The implications of these differences will be examined in Chapter 6 in relation to employees' experiences.

Owners from both kinds of Flexible firms had recent work histories that were similar. Compared to two Rigid firm owners (22 percent), 16 Flexible/favourable firm owners (76 percent) and five Flexible/contradictory firm owners (83 percent) had positions in the IT industry prior to their current ownership position. Where Flexible firm owners worked in IT varied: six owned a small company, eight worked for a large company (including consultancy), three did contract work for the government, two worked in small firms, and two did freelance work (one for a large company and one for a company with an unknown size). Among the Flexible firm owners who worked outside of IT, four were employed by large companies and one worked for a public organization. The recent industry experience of most Flexible firm owners may have led them to employ responsible autonomy as a management control strategy in their current firm.

With regard to their past employment experiences, most flexible firm owners described their negative experiences from previously working in large companies that were not their prior place of employment. Parallel experiences were not expressed by Rigid firm owners. In the section below, I first present these negative experiences and then the positive experiences of owners who spoke about their more recent experiences working in a large IT company. Flexible/favourable firm owners' work-life experiences are also described. I show that past employment has lasting effects for Flexible firm owners in the development of their small firms' FWPs and workplace cultures with respect to working time. Throughout these sections I distinguish who was an owner of a Flexible/favourable or a Flexible/contradictory firm.

5.2.3 *Discontent about Previous Work Experiences*

Discontent regarding a previous large employer was a common expression among Flexible firm owners. An owner of SysSolutions, a Flexible/contradictory firm, commented on his past experience:

In a big company you have to have ... structure because there [are] just so many people. But even in a big company it's wrong for people to think that because they've got a title of such and such that they're more important than somebody else because they aren't. (1112016, male, 62 yrs, CEO)

Indeed, large firms tend to have bureaucratic structures to ensure order, predictability, and efficiency among its workforce (Edwards, 1979; Ritzer, 2004; Weber, 1958). The owner above elaborated on his dislike of a pecking order at small firms. He said:

I think a small company is making a huge mistake if they try to run [it] ... like a big company. You can't do it. ... You really need to make the people [feel] comfortable. ... Everybody is working towards a common goal and one person isn't any more important than the other person. (1112016, male, 62 yrs, CEO)

Small firms often lack HR personnel and so a manager or owner handles HR issues, including FWPs (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Kalleberg et al., 1996; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004). Under these circumstances, there is a preference to respond to employees' needs on an informal basis (Pitt-Catsouphes & Litchfield, 2001; Pohlmann and Dulipovici, 2004). Accordingly, employees must approach a manager or owner and request FWPs unless such practices are available in an open-ended manner that does not require permission. Among the small firms discussed in this dissertation, employees tended to approach the owners of the firms. Comfort with small firm owners, then, is imperative because of this informality. Rigid firm owners did not describe this need to put

employees at ease. The perspective of the Flexible firm owner above reflects other Flexible firm owners who avoided formalized power relations in their current firms.

The aversion “to run a small company like a big company” (1112016, male, 62 yrs, CEO) was based on previous experiences. An owner of SoftBytes, a Flexible/favourable firm, commented on his experience of working in a large company that was not in IT. He said:

[My wife and I had] ... a lot of sleepless nights and a lot of fatigue because of the demands of young children [and] not wanting to surrender [the] upward path of your career ... We were in middle management [positions] at that time and ... you'd better be moving or you will be squeezed out. Both of us were in the same situation so it was fairly taxing. ... We started making some decisions in our late thirties to say, 'we have to position ourselves better for our lifestyle or we will succumb to it.' ... So we kind of made a decision that we were going to start this transition. (1110068, male, 43 yrs, CEO)

Valuing the quantity of time spent working over the quality of work completed has increasingly been used as a management control strategy to align workers' interests with those of the firm (see e.g., Collinson & Collinson, 2004). It requires workers to prioritize work and can have adverse consequences for their work-life balance as the owner above concedes. This particular owner elaborated on his attempt to change his work-life circumstance:

I chose to become an entrepreneur because of ... the freedom, for my family, and for the other pursuits that I had. [While] working in a big corporation I did very well. But I also found that I was captive to the interests of the pyramid ... I felt like I was delivering on objectives that I felt [were] in conflict with my personal values. For example, the President of [the company] took ... a bonus of six hundred thousand dollars on a one-point-two million dollar salary, while as an executive VP I was freezing clerical staff salaries and laying off other people. ... I had big objections to being a part of that. So by being an entrepreneur, I felt I could create a culture ... of the things that I care about, which is about, you know, making sure that the team is happy, making sure that we provide good quality employment, that we put out good product for our customers, and we make a few bucks for our shareholders, that kind of stuff. (1110068, male, 43 yrs, CEO)

According to him, “good quality employment” results when a company is free of restricting rules and takes care of its employees. This care includes facilitating a lifestyle that is not solely work-related. Indeed, trust and work-life balance are important work qualities for employees (Lowe, 2000; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001).

Like the SoftBytes owner, the owner of Biz Software, a Flexible/favourable firm, also experienced time-related pressures while employed at a large company not in the IT industry. He and the other owner of Biz Software worked at this same company. He said:

[The company] had an overt spoken policy and I think I’m giving you a direct quote that was given to me and 75 new hires in the late 80s: ‘If you want to succeed here, be prepared to forfeit time.’ That is the indication of your commitment. ... No measure[s] of performance, quality [of] productivity, customer satisfaction, [or] anything like that. (1105016, male, 40 yrs, CEO)

These ideal behaviours presume that workers can “forfeit time” from their personal lives for work. Under such circumstances, FWP’s were not likely used because of feared repercussions for one’s career (Blair-Loy, 2004; Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Højgaard, 1998; Lewis & Smithson, 2009). The past employment experience of the above owner seemed to have lasting effects on how he developed his current business. He relates his past employment experience to the managerial practices he and his business partner employed at Biz Software:

Management does not pressure people to make their timelines if something is happening behind schedule. ... I don’t believe that you can have ... a good retention rate of your employees and employee satisfaction and have that conveyed into customer satisfaction in sustainable way with the typical burnout cycle that we place on IT workers. So I want these people to give me a good 8 hours every[day] ... In terms of people having to work 60 hours 70 hours a week for months at a time because they’re an IT worker, I don’t buy into that. (1105016, male, 40 yrs, CEO)

Working long hours is not unusual in the IT industry and often accompanies the intense workloads that result for workers from firms’ attempts to be competitive (Downie,

Dryburgh, McMullin, & Ranson, 2004; James, 2011; Perrons, 2003; MacEachen et al., 2008; Shuey & Speigel, 2010). This Biz Software owner attempted to mitigate such firm risks and be supportive of employees' needs which included time for non-working activities and using FWPs. As a result, he also resisted dominant class, age, and gender ideologies that Rigid firm owners conformed to in their respective firms.

Some Flexible firm owners did not make parallel references to their past employment experiences. Four owners did not mention even working at a large company. They include owners at GP Solutions, Custom Software, and Advanced Chips; all of these firms were Flexible/favourable firms. During the past 20 years, the owners of GP Solutions and Advanced Chips owned at least one other small firm; they became entrepreneurs in their 20s and early 30s and were currently in their 50s and 60s. Custom Software's owners became entrepreneurs in their 20s and were now in their 30s. Prior to their firm, they worked in full-time positions at their schools and in part-time positions at retail stores. Despite having a different work history compared to many of the Flexible firm owners, this co-owner of Custom Software commented about what it would be like to work full-time in a large company. He said:

I don't know how other people work with their schedules. I think it depends I guess on the company culture ... whether it's sporadic and independent base[d] work or it's structured nine-to-five, departmental, functional kind of set up, which might be in large organizations. For us though I like it. ... It matches our personalities, which is very independent. (1103003, male, 30 yrs, CEO)

When asked about his typical day, he said:

[Our son] is out the door first thing and then I usually go to the gym ... [for] like an hour and a half or so, and then come back and then work through the day. Then about five we usually get [our son] again and then in the evening I don't usually do anything unless I have to, like when he's home. ... If I have to do stuff I'll do it ... usually at night about nine to eleven. (1103003, male, 30 yrs, CEO)

He and his co-owner, who was also his wife, worked around their son's schedule. His preferred work-life integration seemed to influence the relative flexibility for employees at Custom Software.

5.2.4 Positive Reflections of Working in IT

As noted earlier, some Flexible firm owners did not express discontent about their previous experiences at a large company. These four owners all co-owned Interface Consulting, a Flexible/favourable firm, and had worked at the same large IT company for most of their careers prior to their current position. This particular IT company was exemplary in treating its employees well and was known for trusting them to complete their work responsibilities. For the purposes of this dissertation, this large company is referred to here as ProGMS. The current President of Interface Consulting supervised the three other owners during their time at ProGMS. The President commented, "I'd gotten to Director Level ... It was as good as it can get without being your own boss. ... I had so much freedom" (1115006, female, 48 yrs). Another owner described this "freedom" in relation to how work was structured at Interface Consulting as he said,

When I was at ProGMS, [she] had a lot of control. ... ProGMS was fairly loose in terms of the sense that they would delegate stuff to the Director level. So the Director could choose to let people to work at home. ... *As long as [work] got done.* ... So [here] it is pretty similar ... [it is] more or less the same policy.
(1115012, male, 42 yrs, owner)

He implied that responsible autonomy was employed by the Directors at ProGMS and by the owners of Interface Consulting. Recall from Chapter 2 that responsible autonomy is a management control strategy that gives workers some leeway in how they perform their work (Friedman, 1977, 2000). It is considered to be an ideal way to manage highly

skilled workers in new economy industries, like IT, in which a stable, long-term, mobility track is not characteristic (Damarin, 2006; Frenkel et al., 1995; Malone, 2004; Marshall, Craft Morgan, & Haviland, 2010; Newell et al., 2002). A different owner of Interface Consulting remarked, “We mimicked the way it was in ProGMS because that’s where we came from so the structure as it was there [is] sort of reflected in [this] company” (1115024, male, 38 yrs). It seems that these owners had similar intentions as those of other Flexible firm owners to give workers some autonomy in their work. The owners of Interface Consulting elaborated on their management styles and working behaviours, described below.

Interface Consulting had formal HR policies that included “the legal stuff” and medical benefits but not FWPs (1115012, male, 42 yrs, owner). This owner commented on the firm’s FWPs:

There’s some informal stuff. Like if ... you got a family [member who is] sick, that’s not necessarily covered within [the policy] ... [But,] ‘Go home early today and whatever. Just make sure you *get this done*.’ So there’s the informal stuff like that ... It’s very much oriented around, I understand you have a commitment at home [and] you have a commitment to the company. If you can get stuff done, like we don’t really care ... if you’re doing it from home [or] if you’re leaving one day early and coming in on a weekend. (1115012, male, 42 yrs)

According to the literature, FWPs available informally are used with the expectation that employees will give something back to the firm – typically extra time when the firm needs employees to work overtime; this form of reciprocity is called *flexibility-for-flexibility* (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Wharton et al., 2008). The form of reciprocity referred to in the above comment does not necessarily involve workers performing work outside of their regular duties; this exchange is referred to as *getting the work done*, as introduced in Chapter 4. It is still an

exchange because employees were presumably held accountable to finish their work for using FWPs. Both forms of reciprocity mentioned here reflect responsible autonomy, but they may have different implications for employees whose experiences will be examined in Chapter 6. Notably, the above comment also suggests that Interface Consulting did not make the gendered presumption that workers were neutral and able to carry out work demands with little interference.

The other owners of Interface Consulting also talked about trusting their employees. A different owner commented, “I don’t care where they work or how they’ll do it, as long as they deliver on time ... that’s really the only measuring stick that I have, and as long as the client is happy (1115024, male, 38 yrs). He too suggested that Interface Consulting was results-oriented and employed responsible autonomy. Only the office manager did not have the autonomy of choosing when and where to perform her work because “she’s our face to the world” said the President (1115006, female, 48 yrs). The office manager’s job required her to answer the phone during regular business hours (9am-5pm). With this exception, there was no fixed schedule that employees were required to work. For instance, the President regularly took some “me-time” before she came to the office at 10am. When asked if, being a small company, it was a challenge to offer FWPs to its workers, one of the owners replied, “I think it’s actually less of a challenge, I don’t think it’s more of a challenge ... People perform ... if you go, ‘look here’s your goals you’ve got to *get it done*, we don’t care how, we’ll trust you” (1115012, male, 42 yrs). The owners were in agreement on how to manage employees at their small firm.

A unique feature of Interface Consulting was that two of the four owners were women. Excluding family-owned firms, there were three women owners in the sample, all of whom were in Flexible/favourable firms. Scholars suggest that women in privileged positions may not have much power if their work is regarded as prototypically female (Charles & Grusky, 2004); they are positioned as experts but are not decision-makers (Kanter, 1977) or they are pressured or obliged to fit-in with masculine workplace cultures (Ranson, 2005; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). The women owners at Interface Consulting had decision-making power; one was the firm's President who had a greater proportion of ownership compared to the other three owners. Both of these women contributed to the development of FWPs and working time behaviours and rules. It should also be noted that these two women, along with the other two owners of Interface Consulting, were highly educated; three of these owners had a graduate degree. Their seemingly liberal or non-traditional perspectives, in co-occurrence with their previous work history at ProGMS, influenced them to support a workplace that gave workers some autonomy in their day-to-day work activities and that acknowledged workers' non-working lives and responsibilities in the firm's workplace practices. In turn, such practices challenge dominant gender and class ideologies; traditional expectations of men and women, as well as the presumption that workers have inherent conflicting interests to the interests of owners, are not adhered to. The intersection of gender and class relations is discussed further in Chapter 7.

5.2.5 *Work-Life Experiences*

According to the literature, managers' support of gendered ideal worker behaviours and lack of support for FWPs constrain employees' use of available FWPs (Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2004; Higgins et al., 2008; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). Their lack of personal experience with work-life challenges has been presumed to account for this discouragement (Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009). One difference that emerged between Flexible firm owners centres on the work-life experiences discussed. This topic arose as a theme among Flexible/favourable firm owners but not among Flexible/contradictory and Rigid firm owners. I present these data below along with the current working time behaviours of owners and employees in both kinds of Flexible firms.

Six Flexible/favourable firm owners (of 21) experienced work-life challenges at a prior place of employment or during the start-up phase of their own firms. These six owners came from four firms and two of them were women. During their past employment at large formalized workplaces, the CEO of SoftBytes and the two owners of Biz Software felt constrained from the pressure to "forfeit time" from their personal lives for work. Driven by their negative experiences, these particular owners improved their work-life integration in their current ownership positions. Work-life challenges were averted by three PSIT owners who recently altered their working lives. This owner spoke of his experience during PSIT's start-up.

Early on in the company we were working long hours ... Now with families ... we have different priorities and we don't want to work as long. ... Taking time away from the company to satisfy those family requirements is a higher priority than it was before. (1114006, male, 39 yrs)

The amount by which their total hours reduced was unclear. A different PSIT owner concurred about their new commitment to family life:

We've made a decision. All three of us ... [have] small children ... and when one of us is not in because of [a] sick kid ... there's no hard feelings because we know we'll be the next one ... That was a conscious decision that will be [a] part of this company. But if it was a trade off between you know profit and time ... we would like to have the time at this stage in life more than the profit. Sometimes it's a clear trade off and sometimes it's not but our hours of work are flexible.

(1114032, male, 38 yrs)

These comments support a relational view of gender. Like women, men can also experience disadvantages from the ways in which work is gendered. Due to different expectations of men and women as workers and caregivers, men's disadvantages do not parallel the disadvantages women experience. But these men here made changes to their working lives as ways to negotiate their work-life integration. Presumably, they could empathize with employees who need to use FWPs in order to meet their work-life responsibilities (Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009).

In contrast to these work-life challenges, four Flexible/favourable firm owners had positive past experiences. These owners, who include two women, owned Interface Consulting. They suggested earlier that their previous large employer, ProGMS, accommodated their personal lives.

The owners at the remaining four Flexible/favourable firms spoke only of their current work-life experiences. The following comment by the owner of GP Solutions reflects these experiences. He said: "I've teamed with this company to complement what I want to do in life. I've already twisted and screwed up the company to the point where I get personal benefits, as well as professional [and] financial [benefits]" (1108003, male,

60 yrs, owner). Indeed, small business owners tend to own a small business in order to have control and independence in their work decisions (Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004).

The hours typically worked by Flexible/favourable firm owners suggest they had a different outlook on work-life balance compared to Rigid firm owners. The majority of the 21 Flexible/favourable firm owners worked between 40 and 50 hours per week (n=17). Only four worked heroic hours of work (at least 50 hours per week). The comments in this section by Flexible/favourable firm owners suggest that gender equity was supported in their firms, at least more so than in Flexible/contradictory and Rigid firms. Flexible/favourable firm owners valued their own personal lives and seemingly those of their employees. Employees did not regularly work overtime and averaged between 35 and 45 hours of work per week (see Table 4.4). The ways in which gender relations were negotiated in Flexible/favourable firms is discussed further in Chapter 7. Notably, this negotiation also involved class and age relations which intersect with gender relations as indicated by the conceptual framework of this dissertation. As shown in Chapter 4, Flexible/favourable firm owners and their employees were both relatively older. This combination was unique to these firms and will be touched upon again in Chapters 6 and 7.

Flexible/contradictory firm owners spoke little about their work-life experiences. These owners were relatively younger compared to Flexible/favourable firm owners. Although the three owners of SysSolutions were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, the owners of Online Design and Net Host were in their 20s – the youngest owners of the study. Among these three younger owners, one had young children but did not have full-time custody of them. Two of the owners of SysSolutions had older adult children and one had younger

children. Regardless of their parental status, the current work-life balance of Flexible/contradictory firm owners was heavily weighted on work. Half of these owners worked at least 50 hours per week and included one owner from each of the three firms. The other owners worked about 40 hours per week. The hours of Flexible/contradictory firm owners were similar to those of Rigid firm owners. Employees of Flexible/contradictory firms, however, frequently worked overtime (see Table 4.4). Employees were also younger and most did not have caregiving responsibilities. Owners of these firms encouraged long hours, intentionally or unintentionally, through their own working behaviours. Consequently, gender equity was not supported at these firms and ageist stereotypes were reproduced. This point will be addressed further in Chapter 7.

5.3 The Linked Lives in Family-Owned Small Businesses and the Firm's Flexibility

Family-owned firms refer to firms that are at least 50 percent controlled or owned by one member of a family and employ more than one family member (de Kok, Uhlaner, & Thurik, 2006; Moshavi & Koch, 2005). The five family-owned firms that met this criterion in this study were identified in Chapter 4 and include E&C Solutions, FC Software, Online Design, A&S Systems, and Custom Software.¹⁹ Limited research on the FWP of family-owned businesses leads us to expect that these particular study firms would be relatively inflexible (Moshavi & Koch, 2005). As shown in Chapter 4, the relative flexibility of these firms was not based on family-ownership (see Table 4.5). Chapter 4 categorized E&C Solutions and FC Software as Rigid firms, Online Design as a Flexible/contradictory firm, and A&S Systems and Custom Software as

¹⁹ A brother and sister worked at IT Consulting where the brother was one of the partners. He owned at most one-third of the company which does not qualify this firm to be family-owned.

Flexible/favourable firms. The literature has assumed homogeneity among family-owned firms, including the familial relationships within, but this study finds that reality is more variable.

This study considers multiple perspectives regarding the availability and use of FWPs, whether formal or informal, and the associated working time behaviours and rules of small firms that employed less than 50 individuals. In comparison, Moshavi and Koch (2005) surveyed only Human Resources (HR) managers about the availability of FWPs through formal HR policies. The small firms Moshavi and Koch studied employed less than 500 employees. Research indicates that the use of FWPs provides more accurate information about a firm's relative flexibility because structural and workplace constraints can inhibit their use (see Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Bailyn, 2006; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Hochschild, 1997; Rapoport et al., 2002). Further, the effect of family-ownership status in Moshavi and Koch's study may have been exaggerated because of the definition of small firms used and the focus on formal HR policies. Studies that use a small number of employees (1-49) to delineate small firms indicate that HR personnel are not likely present and that informal FWPs are more prevalent than formal FWPs (see Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004).

In order to understand why variation occurs among family-owned small firms, the complexities of families must be appreciated through the linked lives life course concept used in this study. Families are complex units and have their own intricacies, partly due to the different combinations of linked lives among family members (Ward, 2008). Notably among family-owned firms in this study, the family members were spouses. Spouses have contingent lives with each other whereby one spouse's career decisions,

transitions, and employment pathways are not experienced in isolation of the other spouse's life experiences (Moen, 2003). The conceptual framework of this dissertation indicates that linked lives occur over time and in the context of structured social relations. The analysis below, then, assesses the linked lives among spouses in the family-owned firms with respect to their negotiated division of labour over time and their current occupational positions. These ties are considered in relation to their firms' flexible or inflexible classifications.

Different patterns emerged between Rigid firms and Flexible family-owned firms. An exception was the linked lives at Online Design that shared more similarities with those at Rigid firms than those at Flexible/favourable firms. Below, the respective linked lives in E&C Solutions and Custom Software are compared. These firms are case examples because they best exemplify contrasting linked lives between firm-types. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

5.3.1 E&C Solutions, a Rigid Firm: A Traditional Relationship

E&C Solutions was a Rigid firm. Ian and Monica have owned this firm for almost 10 years and have been married for more than 25 years. At the time of the study, their children were adults and no longer lived with them.

Ian and Monica held different positions of power in their firm. Ian was President and Monica was the office manager. With regard to her typical day Monica said, "I do cash-flows and answer phones" (1101107, female, 52 yrs, office manager). She did mundane administrative tasks, such as the firm's bookkeeping, and did not manage employees or give technical input regarding the direction of the company; in the labour

market, administrative jobs are considered low-status positions because they are typically low-paying, have few benefits, and are predominantly filled by women (Creese, 2007; Reskin & Roos, 1990). In contrast, being company President is accompanied with privilege and power. Ian had control over the company's practices.

How Ian and Monica negotiated their work and family responsibilities paralleled their different positions at E&C Solutions. When they had children, Monica transitioned out of the labour force while Ian remained in it; they did not own E&C Solutions at this time. They had a traditional male-breadwinner and female-homemaker division of labour, an arrangement that was not uncommon during the late seventies and early eighties when they were raising their children (Moen, 1992). When asked about how she found balancing work and family when her children were younger, Monica commented:

I don't think we've had too much trouble... I haven't been working straight through ... I've had time off when they were little. I think Ian would have preferred to have more time with them. ... He is a bit of a workaholic. (1101107, female, 52 yrs, office manager)

Ian did not comment on this arrangement, perhaps because it was taken-for-granted at the time. This arrangement, however, enabled him to be solely concerned with his work responsibilities. After their youngest child was an older teenager, Monica transitioned back into the labour force to work at E&C Solutions with Ian.

In their current situation, both Ian and Monica spent a lot of time doing work-related activities for E&C Solutions. Ian commented on his hours of work:

If I ... came here at nine and left at five, I think my wife would die of a heart attack. For me, we're typically here [at] eight thirty[a.m.] ... If I can get out of here by eight thirty[p.m.], it's kind of been a good day ... eight thirty is maybe a little late, but it's not unusual at all. (1101029, male, 53 yrs, President)

He seemed to accept long hours of work because he was an entrepreneur. Monica, however, was unhappy with this focus on work. She complained:

[Ian] and I tend to take [work] home. It's really hard to differentiate. You work really long hours and it's hard to just sort of cut it off and say, 'okay no more work.' We tend to discuss everything ad nauseam. So it is a little difficult because it's like twenty-four seven for work. ... I don't like taking it home ... I would love to be financially set that I could be at home. ... Then, you know, if [Ian has] a hard day, [he] can come home and talk and I don't have an opinion of what he should be doing. (1101107, female, 52 yrs, office manager)

Although her hours of work were less than her husband's, she preferred fewer hours herself. "I would much rather be part-time. If I could afford it so we can't right now." Ian's career path seemed to take priority over her preferences, an indication that the couple continued to negotiate their family lives along gender lines.

These intimate details of Ian and Monica's relationship are telling for their firm's relative inflexibility for employees. Due to the nature of family-owned firms, this couple currently experienced work and family as overlapping areas of life. Examining their linked lives over time, however, informs us that work and family were experienced as separate spheres of life (Kanter, 1977) for a large part of their lives. Ian lacked the personal experience of work-life challenges because his life was linked to Monica's life. This lack of personal experience may have impeded his understanding of why employees need or desire to use FWP and thus, influenced his decisions regarding FWPs (Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009). Employees at E&C Solutions regularly worked long hours and rarely used FWPs; if such practices were utilized, employees *owed back time* to the firm. Earlier in this chapter, the President of this firm mentioned that he delegated managerial power to the project manager who tended to "eat [her]

young.” Despite his opinion of her managerial style, he seemed comfortable with the lack of FWPs available or used at the firm.

Research on family-owned firms and FWPs concurs. The relative inflexibility for employees is reasoned to occur because of inward thinking by owners whereby family members at the business adjust their family lives to work and expect their employees to do the same (Moshavi & Koch, 2005). This past research, however, presumes homogeneity and hence does not provide an adequate explanation for alternative outcomes.

Ian and Monica’s linked lives, which included a traditional division of labour and the separate experiences in the domains of work and family, are reflective of the interdependent ties of the family members at FC Software. Similar to Monica, the wife at FC Software exited the labour force while her children were younger. The division of labour and decision-making power along gender lines was also evident at Online Design, a Flexible/contradictory firm. The husband and wife at Online Design differed with regard to their younger ages and being childless. The personal story presented above contrasts with the linked lives of family members at Flexible/favourable firms.

5.3.2 Custom Software, a Flexible/favourable Firm: An Egalitarian Relationship

Custom Software was a Flexible/favourable firm. Anne and Ted have owned Custom Software for five years and have been married for a few years longer than that. They have a young school-aged child, Logan, at home. Anne and Ted were the sole owners but considered one programmer as an unwritten partner. Nevertheless, it was still a family-owned firm influenced by the tie between Anne and Ted.

Anne and Ted had relatively equal power as owners. Ted held the designated CEO title and Anne was the IT manager. Although she did the firm's bookkeeping, Anne did not strictly do administrative tasks, unlike Monica at E&C Solutions. Ted commented:

We're now starting to track the hours we're working for Custom Software ... because I think out of all of us [Anne] ... does the most hours for Custom Software so we want to make sure it's fair that way. (1103003, male, 30 yrs)

Ted and Anne both contributed to Custom Software's development activities and business operations, including informal practices regarding FWPs.

This equality between Ted and Anne at work was paralleled in their negotiation of work and family life. When Logan was born, neither Anne nor Ted transitioned out of the labour force; they did not own Custom Software at this particular point in time. Since becoming parents, both Anne and Ted had both assumed work and family responsibilities.

Ted and Anne suggested that work-life integration was instrumental in their firm's practices. Ted described his typical day at Custom Software in the following way:

[Our kid] is out the door first thing and then I usually go to the gym from there, like an hour and a half or so, and then [I] come back and then work through[out] the [day] ... Then in the evening, I don't usually do anything unless I have to when he's home. ... Usually at night about 9 to 11 I'm usually back on the computer ... so that I get some work done. (1103003, male, 30 yrs, CEO)

Later in the interview, Ted commented, "Obviously our personal lives are mixed in."

Anne described her work schedule in a similar way:

We work when other people don't ... If [Logan] goes to bed instead of watching TV you're working on something. When he goes to his friend's house, you're working on something. Then maybe certain mornings during the week you're not working, but you're going to work that night. The fact that we are our own bosses ... we have the flexibility. (1103016, female, 30 yrs, IT manager)

Their integration of family responsibilities with work activities occurred because of their linked lives with each other. Working around their child's activities and needs exemplifies their high regard for family life and implies that dominant gender ideologies were resisted. This integration reflects a different kind of inward thinking compared to the separation or prioritization of work evident in Rigid family-owned firms. This contribution will be elaborated on in Chapter 7.

Anne and Ted's linked lives, which included an egalitarian division of labour and decision-making power at their firm, reflect the interdependent lives among spouses at A&S Systems. One difference is that the spouses at A&S Systems did not have children. The personal stories of the spousal relations at Flexible/favourable firms emphasized equity.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter showed variation among Flexible and Rigid firm owners in their employment pathways and related experiences, conformation or resistance to structured social relations, and linked lives of family members in family-owned firms. Rigid firm owners generally did not work in the IT industry in their previous position and their current work responsibilities were prioritized over their family or personal responsibilities. Their experiences reveal that Rigid firm owners favoured direct and structured management control strategies. As noted above, the formalized power relations in Rigid firms contrast the management control strategies typically used in IT firms and in small firms that were found in Flexible firms. Flexible firm owners tended to have

positions in IT prior to their current position and their past employment experiences drove them to give employees some autonomy in their work.

Yet, variation occurred among Flexible firm owners in relation to their work-life experiences. Flexible/favourable firm owners acknowledged the personal lives of their workers and valued their own. Most Flexible/favourable firm owners worked between 40 and 50 hours per week, whereas half of the Flexible/contradictory firm owners worked at least 50 hours per week (including one owner from each of the three firms). Gendered expectations were reproduced in Flexible/contradictory firms and blurred in Flexible/favourable firms. Among family-owned firms that were categorized as Flexible/favourable, gender relations were negotiated by spouses in ways that emphasized equity in their division of labour and distribution of work in their current firms. In comparison, traditional gendered expectations were reproduced by spouses in the other family-owned firms.

Through their linked lives, the owners' lives structured the opportunities available to employees (see Dannefer, 2003) with regard to using FWP. Employees' access to and the use of FWPs was affected by the lives of their small firm owners. Workers' experiences are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Employee Experiences of Flexibility in Small IT Firms

Previous chapters have illustrated heterogeneity among small IT firms in this study in relation to their relative flexibility for employees and accompanying workplace cultures with respect to working time. This variation occurred because of the interaction of structural and individual factors. This dissertation now explores how workers experience flexible workplace practices (FWPs) in the context of these small firms. This question has not often been asked in the literature due to the little attention small firms receive in relation to FWPs (Lero & Lewis, 2008; MacDermid et al., 1994; Pitt-Catsouphes & Litchfield, 2001). In this chapter, I will show that employees' experiences varied according to their firms' relative flexibility status and working time behaviours and rules. Findings challenge the presumption existing literature makes that FWPs available through formal HR policies will lead to more positive working environments compared to informal negotiations. I present the experiences of employees in Rigid firms first, and then employees' experiences in the two kinds of Flexible firms.

6.1 Employees in Rigid Firms

The only respondents from the sample who expressed disappointment with or confusion about the FWPs available at their firms were employees at Rigid firms (FC Software was the exception). As noted previously in Chapter 5, the establishment of formalized power relations and restrictions about working time in Rigid firms are characteristics also found in bureaucratic systems that tend to exist in large firms (Ritzer, 2004; Weber, 1958) but are unusual for IT firms (Benner, 2002; MacEachen et al., 2008; Ranson, 2003; Reich, 1992; Sennett, 1998). This contrast between Rigid firms and those

small and IT firms discussed in the literature is illustrated in the case example below of ComTech. ComTech exemplifies other Rigid firms because the use of FWPs was rare. It was, however, a unique study firm because it had a formal HR policy that included FWPs. Despite this difference, what it was like for employees to work in ComTech reflects the experiences of employees in the other four Rigid firms. Similar to other Rigid firms, employees at ComTech were younger (under 40 years), male, white, and Canadian-born. The firm was not family-owned, and like other Rigid firms (Consyst and WebBytes) that were not family-owned, men had an overwhelming presence at this firm.

6.1.1 ComTech: “a small company ... run as if it’s a big company”

ComTech was a software development firm located in Ontario. It had two owners, four managers, and eight other employees. The sole woman at this firm held an administrative position and was not interviewed. The median ages of employees and owners were 31 years (range 25-36 years) and 35 years (range 33-36 years), respectively; in comparison, the median ages of all Rigid firm employees and owners were 30 years and late 40s/early 50s years, respectively. There was one person from a visible minority at this firm.

The Chief Technical Officer (CTO) established ComTech five years ago in City A (1117084, male, 33 yrs, City A). After the first year, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) joined the firm and became a co-owner. He assumed the role of business head and started up a second location in City B (1117175, male, 36 yrs, City B). Prior to this, the CEO was a business consultant and the CTO was employed at a large IT company. Despite having four managers at ComTech, the owners remained in control over the HR issues at

their respective office locations. As noted in the previous chapter, this situation was common among all study firms.

ComTech had formal HR policies that included the FWPs of flex-time, working from home, and sick days. Recall from Chapters 1 and 4 that employees in the study firms were not legally entitled to sick days and these were considered FWPs by respondents; they are discussed alongside FWPs in this chapter. In ComTech's HR policies, the number of paid sick days available was not specified but depended on an employee's circumstance. If more than three consecutive days were taken, a doctor's note was required. Sick days could be used to care for a family member. Flex-time enabled employees to choose when they started and finished their eight-hour work day, but they had to work from 10am to 4pm; the other two hours needed to be immediately prior to or after these "core hours." The obligation to work during these core hours was said to be based on the need to provide customer service. Employees also had the option to work from home. In order to use this FWP, employees had to receive their supervisor's permission, give at least five days notice, and provide "just cause." Also, this FWP could only be used by employees from "time-to-time." How often this FWP could be used, and examples of "just cause" were not specified in the HR document.

Flex-time gave employees three different shifts to choose from on a daily basis: 8am to 4pm, 9am to 5pm, and 10am to 6pm. According to one IT manager, these acceptable working times when employees can work have changed over time. He said:

I much preferred when we started out and ... my hours were *get my work done*. If I chose to work four in the morning to four in the afternoon, that was fine. As we've grown and our needs have changed, we now have ten to four core hours. I'm not a morning person [so] that hurts me a little. I'm not so fond [of it]. But you know it's understandable when we're doing business and the CEO of [a

company] is calling me, he needs to know I'm going to be in the office. (1117110, male, 29 yrs, City B)

This manager was younger and childless and yet he desired greater flexibility. He had worked for ComTech since its start-up, a time when only the CTO ran the company. Although he suggested that flex-time was a benefit secondary to the primary requirement of working the core hours, this FWP was talked about favourably by others. A different IT manager said:

I think the company's actually very, very flexible in a lot of things. ...Like, my wife is pregnant. She's actually due [in four months] ... Our flex hours are we have to be in the office between ten and four and at work for eight hours a day, so that's kind of one of the policies. (1117149, male, 32 yrs, City B)

He did not elaborate on this experience. This FWP and the rule regarding when work should be performed were clear.

Working from home, however, had many conditions described earlier in this case example. "Management here is allergic to people working from home during business hours ... [If] you want to work from home, you have to arrange 'x' days in advance" said another IT manager (1117032, male, 31 yrs, City B); the HR booklet stated at least five days in advance was necessary. Because the above manager worked in City B, the "management" he referred to was the CEO. This engineer also commented about the unavailability of this FWP. He said:

When I got hired ...they [were] ... against working from home and that still seems to be the case, although parents seem to be [the exception]. If there's a problem, [management] seems to be okay with letting them work from home. I'm hoping that that will still be in effect whenever I have a kid. ...That hasn't been set down as a policy or anything so it's hard to say what the actual thing is. (1117097, male, 25 yrs, City A)

At the present time, he was single and childless. About half of the firm members at ComTech were not parents and were conceivably unable to use this FWP even though

this condition was not explicitly stated in the HR policy. As noted earlier, examples of “just cause” circumstances were not provided in the HR policy. But, if parents were the presumed benefactors of this FWP, perhaps “just cause” was a sick child. This circumstance, however, tends to arise suddenly and contradicts the forethought required in the HR policy. The confusion and inconsistent implementation of this FWP is indicative of how HR policies do not always lead to positive work environments. The formal FWPs at ComTech seemed to be established as procedural rules that have the effect of discouraging employees from requesting their use. This finding is supported by past research on large companies, not small ones (see Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Blair-Loy, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009).

Despite the pressures against working from home, some firm members used this FWP. The CEO worked from home before or after business hours only, which suggests that using FWPs does not mean long hours of work are not performed (MacEachen et al., 2008). The CTO and a programmer, however, regularly worked at home during business hours (8am to 6pm). The CTO commented:

I like to work at home. I’m generally very productive at home, at least for certain kinds of work ... When I’m at home, you know I might be able to be productive [in] putting together a proposal or doing some development related work but you know that means that I’m not here helping other people out. (1117084, male, 33 yrs, City A)

He did not comment further on this experience. If he was the only member to use this FWP, then this exception would be solely based on the CTO’s status position as an owner. The programmer who also worked from home regularly remarked:

I recently had a baby ... I try to work from home one day a week so I can, you know sort of help out there ... So that’s the flexibility thing it’s pretty good. ... Working at home helped me out ... [to] go to doctor’s appointments with my wife and things like that. (1117045, male, 29 yrs, City A)

He also mentioned, “I’m not sure we really have any well defined policies type thing ... I sort of have an understanding that you know as long as it’s not really interfering with my ability to get my work done.” These comments suggest that formal protocols to work from home were not followed. Accordingly, this use is considered an informal FWP.

The one programmer’s use of this FWP may be a function of linked lives with the CTO. Both firm members worked at the City A location whereas the CEO, who initiated the HR policies, worked at the City B location. Recall from the previous chapter that the CTO wanted to avoid the “button-down corporate feel” he previously experienced in large companies and accordingly, favoured giving employees flexibility and autonomy in their work. The CEO did not have such experiences and preferred rule-based HR policies that consolidated all time-related benefits. The linked lives between employees and the employer at their location may have structured their opportunities to work from home. This idea, however, is challenged by a comment made earlier by an engineer about the pressures against working from home because he too worked at the City A office with the CTO. He thought employees who were parents were the only exception to this rule. It seemed that working from home for this engineer was something that interested him in the future. He said:

At the moment it doesn’t pose too much of an interest for me because I don’t have a huge place at home so the idea of working in the same place I live does not appeal too much to me. If I had like a separate room or something it would probably appeal to me much more. (1117097, male, 25 yrs, City A)

If he attempted to negotiate working from home with the CTO, he may have received permission. But, the pressures not to work from home thwarted him from making such a

request. From an employee's perspective, approaching an owner as opposed to a manager is presumably more daunting because of the large power difference.

The uneven practice of working from home suggests that the informal FWPs at ComTech were inequitable. Other firm members were aware of these two rare instances of people working from home. A programmer who did not work from home said:

The CTO in [City A] often works from home. There's [another guy there] who sometimes works from home, but I mean as a company ... we're supposed to be in to work for the core hours ... Some people are a little bit more like, 'well how come so and so gets to work at home and we don't?' ... [The] only [days] ... I work from home ... will be on the weekends or night-time. (1117019, male, 26 yrs, City B)

FWPs available through informal negotiations do not necessarily lead to a positive work environment. This finding also gives support to previously unsupported claims in the research regarding informal FWPs (see Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Golden, 2008). The above comment also points out a contradiction within ComTech's HR policies regarding its two types of FWPs. The requirement to be present at the office from 10am to 4pm inherently opposes the FWP that enables employees to work from home. This working time rule is referred to as face-time in the literature (Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Hochschild, 1997).

The presence of this face-time rule at ComTech is also supported through employees' descriptions of their experiences with the firm's sick day policy. Keep in mind that the HR policy did not explicitly state the number of sick days permitted. This IT manager commented:

[A former employee] had had some ... health issues. At one point [he] took a leave of absence for an extended period of time ... When he came back he would still continue to take the odd sick day ... Management really didn't like that. But they didn't say that. They said, 'Okay that's it. No more sick days for the year.'

Just (respondent snaps fingers) ‘bam’ like no warning, no addressing the issue. (1117032, male, 31 yrs, IT manager, City B)

He was really upset about this situation in the interview. He later claimed that this arbitrary decision and the subsequent new rules contributed to feelings of paranoia among staff. This project manager also spoke of the policy change. He said:

We have a nebulous number of [sick] days ... If you’re sick ‘x’ number of days in a year then they’ll start pulling off your vacation time. Nobody’s actually told me what [this] number of days is yet ... I think when that policy was introduced they needed to make it a little clearer ... I understand that policies have to be in effect for corporate ... [but] make it as lenient as possible. (1117110, male, 29 yrs, project manager, City A)

This manager spoke earlier about the autonomy he used to have during the start-up period of ComTech. His employers now employed more direct time-related measures of control over workers. The threat to remove vacation days if a certain number of sick days were used reflects the reciprocal exchange of *owing back time* found in all Rigid firms. This situation also reflects a way to punish undesirable behaviours, which is a dimension of Edward’s (1979) system of control that was discussed in Chapter 2. Time away from the office was considered to indicate that workers were not serious about their work responsibilities. When management holds this expectation of where work should occur, the use of FWPs becomes constrained (see Hochschild, 1997; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). As noted above, the presumption that workers will disrupt the labour process without management’s direct intervention is not typical in the IT industry (Benner, 2002; MacEachen et al., 2008; Ranson, 2003; Reich, 1992; Sennett, 1998).

ComTech’s owners did not necessarily understand the scope of the confusion and upset feelings surrounding the firm’s relative inflexibility and stringent rules about when and where to work. Or if they did, they did not want to disclose such information.

Employees had the option to send their concerns to a company HR email address, but it was no secret that these emails went to the CEO's inbox. With no anonymity employees may have been afraid of getting "caught" complaining.

Hours of work and the occurrence of overtime work are other dimensions of the working time aspect of a firm's workplace culture. Interviews suggest that IT managers and employees at ComTech worked a range of 45 to 60 hours a week. Working long hours of work each week was a gendered ideal behaviour identified and discussed in Chapter 2 (see e.g., Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011; Sharone, 2004). According to the CTO, "We don't want to be working people to the bone." But, an IT manager claimed that "this company ... makes it very easy to fall down the hole of working sixty hour weeks and never seeing your family. There are no safeguards in place to prevent that. This is a HR issue that's not being handled" (1117032, male, 31 yrs, City B). He spoke from personal experience.

I ended up working 60 hour weeks for the past three months ... with a couple of exceptions. ...I think it's gotten to the point where that's not okay for me from a mental health and an emotional perspective ... The demands have been really hard and the conflict between personal life and work life has been very evident to me.

He was married and had a young child. He claimed later in the interview that he was thinking about how to negotiate more reasonable project deadlines with the CEO.

The comments above suggest that employees were not explicitly pressured by owners to work long hours, but the expectation appears to be there. Intense workloads and accompanying long hours of work are commonplace in the IT industry (Downie et al., 2004; James, 2011; Perrons, 2003; MacEachen et al., 2008; Shuey & Spiegel, 2010). Ideal IT workers are to be "tough" enough to finish these workloads (Cooper, 2000;

Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008); these behaviours are also masculinized because men are presumed not to be involved fathers or have other important responsibilities (Cooper, 2000). As a result, dominant gender ideologies, masculinity, and youthfulness are supported in the workplace (Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; McMullin & Duerden Comeau, 2011). The manager quoted above relied on his wife and mother-in-law to care for his son. Although this manager was upset with his current work-life balance, the women in his life buffered him from additional conflict. Individuals with substantial caregiving responsibilities would not be able to stay in such a position in the long-term. It is not surprising, then, that so few women and individuals over 40 years work in Rigid firms. Table 4.4 indicates that overtime hours were “occasionally” worked at the firm, but as the comments above suggest, long hours were potentially quite common at ComTech. This suggestion by employees and managers was also made in other Rigid firms, with the exception of WebBytes.

The experiences described by ComTech employees resembled the experiences of other Rigid firm employees. This case example illustrated how the inflexibility of Rigid firms intertwined with a restricting workplace culture with respect to working time. Although ComTech had formalized FWPs unlike other Rigid firms, the informal practices of FWPs and employees’ experiences were parallel. FWPs were rarely used, long hours were common, workers were required to be present at the workplace, and time was owed back to the firm if FWPs (i.e., sick days) were used. The threat to pull time from vacation time, which is a legal entitlement (see Appendix A), if the ComTech’s owners considered that sick days were being used too often is an example of the *owe-*

back-time condition found in Rigid firms but not Flexible firms. These behaviours and rules about when and where employees should work are indicative of the time-oriented controlling strategies used by Rigid firm owners. Accordingly, workers had little autonomy or flexibility in their work.

6.2 Employees in Flexible Firms

As previously noted, the working time behaviours and rules at Flexible/favourable and Flexible/contradictory firms presumably have different implications. Employees' experiences in Interface Consulting and Online Design reflect those of employees in Flexible/favourable firms and Flexible/contradictory, respectively. Interface Consulting is showcased below and Online Design afterward.

6.2.1 Interface Consulting: "work is important but so is your home life"

Interface Consulting was a consulting firm in Ontario. Recall from Chapter 4 that two of the three consulting firms in this study were Flexible/favourable firms. It was suggested then that it is possible these particular firms may be more interested in retaining skilled and knowledgeable employees compared to those in other areas of the industry.

Established four years before interviewing took place, Interface Consulting employed ten employees and had four owners, one of whom was the firm's President. One of the employees was a member of a visible minority and six were women; this relative diversity, compared to ComTech and other Rigid firms, is characteristic of Flexible/favourable firms. At Interface Consulting, the women held positions at all

occupational levels: two were owners, three were consultants, and one was an office manager. Although one woman held an administrative position, neither vertical nor horizontal segregation seemed to exist. The decision-making power and expertise of owners and employees were not divided along gender lines at this firm. The median age of employees was 36 years (range 29-42 years), and 45 years (range 38-55 years) among the four owners; in comparison the median ages of employees and owners, respectively, in Flexible/favourable firms was 40 years and 43 years.

Prior to Interface Consulting's establishment, the owners and most employees had worked at the same large IT company referred to here as ProGMS. Such a long relationship between owners and employees was not unique to Interface Consulting; it was also found in other Flexible/favourable firms that include A&S Systems, GP Solutions, PSIT, and Advanced Chips. In the previous chapter, owners of Interface Consulting described their previous employer, ProGMS, and their current firm as open workplaces that were loosely organized. Interface Consulting did not have HR policies. According to the owners, they used management tactics that were in line with the idea of responsible autonomy. How did employees view this workplace?

One employee commented:

I had two job offers and I decided to go back to Interface Consulting because of my past experience with them. ... I know ... that they value work-life balance over anything else. Work is important but so is your home life, so is your family life. Really as long as you're *getting your work done* and you're doing it well [and] you're meeting commitments, then they are very flexible. In terms of, 'I have to take my daughter to a doctor's appointment and I'm going to be late this day because of that.' Like that's really not even an issue. I don't even stress about that stuff with them. (1115042, female, 35 yrs, other IT)

The adoption of responsible autonomy is considered a strategy among knowledge-intensive firms in order to retain skilled employees (Clear & Dickson, 2005; Frenkel et

al., 1995; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). IT careers lack the stable, long-term, mobility track that is characteristic of traditional employment relations, and hence, moving up the company ladder is not a retention strategy used in IT or other new economy industries (Marshall et al., 2010; Damarin, 2006). Presumably, skilled workers will leave firms that do not accommodate their needs or interests. Interface Consulting retained the above consultant whose work-life balance needs were met.

As suggested above, FWP's were available and used in an open manner by employees. Employees also negotiated special circumstances with the owners based on their needs. One employee commented on her arrangement:

The offer was that I could work three days from home and two days from here ... I really like the idea of virtual offices ... When I come into the office, you spend a lot of time [talking] ... But at home, there's none of that. You're focused 100 percent on your job for [a] very long period of time and I think you get a lot more done at home. (1115036, female, 36 yrs, other IT)

Her arrangement was established upon starting at Interface Consulting. Another employee who recently requested an alternative working arrangement remarked:

[The owners] are very flexible in terms of working arrangements. ... Many of us have families and ... if you need to take off ... for an hour during the day, as long as the *work is getting done* they're quite understanding of our [lives] outside of work. ... I wanted to come in on a four day week because ... I found that gave me a good balance. It gave me enough time [to be] in the office to feel like I was actually a full contributing member, but it also gave me an extra day when I can be with my kids and get errands done ... They've been very supportive of that. We weren't sure from the get-go whether it would work in a consulting environment because you know if a client wants to see you on Friday, you kind of have to be there. But I've been flexible about which day off I take but they've also been very supportive of you know making sure that I get my day off. (1115054, female, 37 yrs, other IT)

The FWP's available informally contributed to a good working environment. Although some individual arrangements were negotiated (e.g., working four days a week), all employees had access to use FWP's, such as flex-time and working from home. This

finding contrasts presumptions made in the literature that employees do not have equal access to use FWP available informally (Gonyea & Googins, 1996; Lero & Lewis, 2008).

The President commented on the work performance of this particular employee. She said, “We do four days a week with [her] because that’s what she wants and ... four days of [her] is like five of a lot of other people” (1115006, female, 48 yrs). This perceived productivity supports the comment an owner of Interface Consulting (1115012) made in the previous chapter that offering FWPs was rewarding for small firms. The power difference between owners and employees did not discourage the employees of this firm from requesting alternative work arrangements, unlike in ComTech. This difference may be due to the autonomy and trust given to employees of Interface Consulting. Together, these employee comments support the owners’ claims that workers had some autonomy in their work and that Interface Consulting was a results-oriented firm. These characteristics are typical of IT firms (James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Richardson, 2008).

The above comments by employees suggest that Interface Consulting resisted gendered expectations. This idea is evident through the recent six months of unpaid parental leave taken by a man at the firm. This parental leave was a unique occurrence among the study firms. Parental leave is a legal entitlement for Canadian employees. In Ontario, the Employment Standards Act (ESA) entitles employees to up to 35 weeks of parental leave, which can be split between employed parents (Service Ontario, 2000; also see Appendix A). The employee who went on parental leave commented, “I don’t think it was an ideal thing for the company ... it’s such a small place. They actually needed to

find someone to replace me for that period. ... I wasn't working at all ... during those six months" (1115048, 34 yrs, analyst). He was not pressured to take a two week vacation instead or to return to work earlier than planned; these managerial pressures have been documented in other work-life research regarding parental leave for men employees (see e.g., Hochschild, 1997).

The owners commented on this parental leave. One said, "You're losing him for a big chunk of time ... it was a challenge to manage. But there was never any question around, 'is this right or what do we do about it?'" (1115018, female, 55 yrs). Indeed, a different owner described the leave as "more [about] figuring out logistics than any kind of head-butting" (1115012, male, 42 years, owner). The President remarked:

At least with parental leave you get enough warning. So it was like okay, we know we've got him until this point so what projects do we get him to work on? ... The big thing in a small business is [will] it ... affect the cash flow? And because of the way it's structured no, it doesn't affect the cash flow other than the fact that benefits still get paid and holiday still accrues throughout parental leave ... We have ... access to subs if we need them. We can work around it. (1115006, female, 48 yrs)

The challenges for this small firm were resolved by hiring a temporary worker to cover some of this time. The owners, regardless of gender, were supportive of a man taking parental leave and did not question whether he should be taking time off work for family responsibilities. Symbolically, this event signifies that gender stereotypes -- such as men are not ideal caregivers -- were blurred at Interface Consulting. The parental leave also indicates that Interface Consulting was supportive of gender equity and the integration of work and life. Although responsible autonomy is characteristic of IT or new economy firms, the incorporation of work-life integration into workplace practices is uncommon (MacEachen et al., 2008). Technologies and the intensity of work that mark the industry

can lead to long hours of work and the need to be available to clients on a 24/7 basis, both of which constrain employees' work-life integration because of the implicating focus on work (Connidis & Kemp, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Shuey & Speigel, 2010).

Integrating non-working lives of employees was also evident at other Flexible/favourable firms although perhaps not as strongly compared to Interface Consulting. This finding will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Interviews suggest that the hours of work each week ranged between 32 and 40 for employees and between 40 and 50 for the owners. Although uncommon, long hours were occasionally required of employees. This analyst said, "Sometimes we're ridiculously busy and we do twelve hour days for two months straight. Other times it's, you know, nice and relaxed [and] ... we can work six hour days" (1115060, male, 29 yrs). The fluctuating business demands and workloads are common occurrences in the IT industry (Benner, 2002; Downie et al., 2004; James, 2011; MacEachen, 2008; Perrons, 2003; Shuey & Speigel, 2010). This variability and intensity of work, however, are considered underlying sources of work-life conflict and stress (Connidis & Kemp, 2011; James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Shuey & Speigel, 2010). Interface Consulting employees did not speak to this conflict. The employee who worked two days each week from home commented, "There's ... flexibility around getting the work done ... which is a two-way door. It goes both ways and that's our expectation anyways" (1115036, female, 36 yrs, other IT). She had two young children, although her husband was the primary caregiver. These occasional long work-days when workers were flexible to the firm may not facilitate work-life integration for some employees, especially those who are primarily responsible for child care.

At Interface Consulting, work seemed to be based along the *getting work done* and *being flexible* for the firm in exchange for the use of FWPs. The exchange of *getting work done* for FWPs occurred throughout the fiscal year. During peak times, this reciprocity required employees to *be flexible* for the firm by working closer to 12-hour days instead of eight hours in order to meet firm deadlines. But during slow times, it was suggested that employees were allowed to reduce their hours of work as long as work was completed.

Interface Consulting shared many similarities with most other Flexible/favourable firms. A range of FWPs were both available and used by employees in these firms and the working time behaviours and rules were supportive of the use of FWPs at these firms. As the case example illustrated, employees in these firms were not expected to *owe* the firm any time after using FWPs or sick days, but these informal FWPs were not standalone benefits. At Interface Consulting two forms of reciprocity occurred simultaneously at times, as described above, and include *getting the work done* and *being flexible* to the firm in exchange for using FWPs. The co-occurrence of these forms of reciprocity was also found in SoftBytes, IT Consulting, and PSIT. Like Interface Consulting, IT Consulting was also a consulting firm. The other two firms specialized in software development, although SoftBytes had specialized in a niche unlike PSIT. At the remaining firms, *getting the work done* was the only exchange for FWPs used, partly because these firms did not experience crunch times like the other firms did. These firms include A&S Systems, GP Solutions, Advanced Chips, Custom Software, and Biz Software. None of these firms were consulting firms. A&S Systems, Custom Software, and Advanced Chips had general specializations in software development and system

analysis, whereas GP Solutions and Biz Software were software development firms that specialized in a particular niche. With the exception of not being consulting firms, the specializations of these firms are not indicative of why employees rarely work overtime. But it was apparent that A&S Systems, Custom Software, and Advanced Chips were struggling to get enough business for their employees to work full-time hours every week. This variation among these Flexible/favourable firms led to a difference in their hours of work but only for a short period of time. These hours of work contrast to those in Flexible/contradictory firms. I now turn to a case example of these Flexible firms.

6.2.2 Online Design: "some projects call for it"

Founded five years ago, Online Design was a web design firm located in Ontario. It had two owners, two managers, and seven other employees. This firm was predominantly filled with young men. The median ages of employees was 27 years (range 20-33 years) and of owners was 28 years (range 27-28 years); in comparison, the median ages of employees and owners of Flexible/contradictory firms were 28 years and 33 years, respectively. There was one woman employee at Online Design who was the office manager; she was also the CEO's wife. She had little power in the decision-making with respect to the business operations. In the other Flexible/contradictory firms, two women were employed at SysSolutions in technical positions but none were employed at Net Host. Compared to Flexible/favourable firms, the relative absence of women at Flexible/contradictory firms suggests that the distribution of power and expertise in the latter firms were divided along gender lines. Although Online Design is a family-owned

firm, employees' experiences reflect the experiences of employees in other Flexible/contradictory firms.

One IT manager spoke about his experiences of the firm's flexibility for employees in relation to his hours of work:

On Monday ... [my wife] had a dentist appointment ... so I just stayed home [in] the morning [with my baby]. ... [The CEO] didn't even realize I was gone. He doesn't expect that you [will] make up the time [missed]. He knows, like last week I was here till midnight one night trying to hit a deadline so it sort of balances out. ... [At my previous] job ... they really had their thumb over your head all the time. ... [You couldn't be] five minutes late in the morning even though you're definitely there fifteen minutes after five many days. (1106081, male, 29 yrs)

Performing overtime one night and then starting work late another day is an instance of the reciprocal exchange of *flexibility-for-flexibility*. In Chapter 4 this form of reciprocity was said to reflect responsible autonomy, which is a management control strategy. Online Design did not have a formal HR policy. The comment above suggests that FWP's were available and used informally in an open-ended, unspoken manner.

Sick days were also available and used informally at Online Design. This designer said, "If you need the time off you go. I mean there are no sick days here, you take what you need and you just get your work done" (1106068, male, 28 yrs). According to the office manager, "If they're sick and they can't come in ... we're very understanding in that aspect. We just kick it up a notch if we have to" (1106094, female, 27 yrs). The lack of conditions and stringent rules attached to FWP's and sick days at Online Design suggests that it was not run like a large bureaucratic company, unlike ComTech. Employees had some leeway in how they conducted their work, like employees of Interface Consulting, but Online Design's employees did not talk about using FWP's as frequently.

Notably, age stereotypes that younger workers are free of dependents and can devote a lot of time to work were upheld and supported at Online Design. An overwhelming majority of employees and managers were childless (80 percent respondents from this firm) and under the age of 30 (88 percent). Indeed, employees and managers worked long hours. Interviews suggest the hours of work at Online Design ranged between 45 and 70 per week; the employers and programmers worked the longest hours. One programmer said:

I've been here [at the office] on weekends and worked. ... [The CEO] doesn't like that because he'd rather you be home with your family. But again some projects call for it [especially when]. ... the timing conflicts and ... you have to try and juggle both projects. (1106029, male, 33 yrs)

This programmer was married and had a young child, and yet, he did not suggest that he experienced work-life conflict because of the long hours of work. This IT manager also noted the conflict between the CEO's preference and what happens. He commented:

I think [the CEO] has tried to set a tone in the office ... He really wants to see people coming in at 9 and leaving at 5 ... That said, we're all aware that we're in IT and 9 to 5 doesn't work all the time. ... There are specific instances where we need guys to step up and do something on the weekend or in [the] evening. (1106016, male, 28 yrs)

The combination of working long hours and using FWPs available informally in exchange for *being flexible* to the firm through overtime hours led to an environment that could be costly for employees. In Online Design, and other Flexible/contradictory firms, it was difficult for employees to use FWPs in ways that facilitated work-life balance because long hours were already worked. These experiences are reflective of those presented in the literature which finds that flexible hours, such as flex-time, can coincide with long hours of work (James, 2011; Perrons, 2003; MacEachen et al., 2008). The autonomy given to employees does not mean that they can control their workloads or that

workplaces are not gendered. The intersection of class, age, and gender is discussed in Chapter 7.

Taking time off is perceivably difficult during the year when long hours are often worked. This programmer, however, claimed he took a week off before he had been employed at the firm for a year. He said, “[When] I joined [the company] I said my brother’s getting married in [another country]. I need a week off, a paid vacation. And he said sure” (1106042, male, 20 yrs). In addition to their legally entitled two weeks off, employees had an additional week off during the holidays. This IT manager, however, exclaimed: “I had a week and a half off at Christmas, we all did. I worked through the whole thing ... It was a bit frustrating in that regard” (1106016). It is uncertain whether this work was due to his managerial position. Employees did not talk much about their vacation time. Closing the firm down for a week likely enabled at least some employees to enjoy some time off. But intense workloads require workers to bring work home, blurring workers’ personal and working lives (MacEachen et al., 2008; Perrons, 2003; Presser, 2003).

Limited research on informal FWP suggests that some employees using this form of reciprocity feared they would be taken advantage of by their superiors (Atkinson & Hall, 2009). At Online Design, employees and managers did not express such fears, but suggested that an imbalance was present. They were being exploited because they were often giving more time to the firm than they were getting back in pay or paid time off. This imbalance is particularly clear when the forms of reciprocity used at Online Design and Interface Consulting are compared. Interface Consulting needed employees to work long hours during its crunch time, which was a two-month period. This peak in their

business cycle had a respective valley during which employees worked fewer hours. In contrast, Online Design had crunch times with little-to-no valley period; employees worked long hours and adapted continuously for the firm. This comparison suggests that employees of Online Design were more likely to be exploited than employees of Interface Consulting. It also implies that in both firms, employees display entrepreneurial behaviours common in IT; employees are given autonomy in when and where they perform their work but adopt the firm's risks through the intensity of work and the accompanying long hours of work (Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; McMullin, Marshall, Duerden Comeau, & Gordon, 2009). These behaviours were not evident in Rigid firms.

Online Design seemed concerned with the long hours that employees tended to work. According to this programmer, at a recent firm meeting they discussed the question, “[what] would allow us not to work so much that it’s not within 9-5?” (1106107, male, 28 yrs). He had not experienced work-family challenges personally but commented:

I haven't really had a chance to think about when I start having kids because I definitely don't want to be doing what I [do now]. If I do what I do now, I'll never know my kids. ... I'll probably be having kids sometime in the near future ... I guess the thing is being able to optimize the time that you have off, but other than that there's not a whole lot more you can do.

Organizational practices needed to change in order for him to be able to work fewer hours. Optimistically, perhaps if more employees and managers became parents there will be pressure to reduce the current workloads, particularly if age stereotypes no longer exist.

This case example reflected the experiences of employees in the other two Flexible/contradictory firms that include Net Host and SysSystem. The majority of employees at these firms were also childless, young, and worked overtime frequently.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter showed how employees' experiences of FWPs in small firms varied across firm-types. In Rigid firms, employees rarely used FWPs and were often either disappointed with or confused about what FWPs were available for them to use. The working time rules of *owing back time* and face-time that were established by the owners reinforced the inflexibility of Rigid firms. Conversely, employees' experiences of FWPs in Flexible firms were more positive. In these firms, employees were trusted to *get their work done* and/or be available to work longer hours for the firm in the foreseeable future (*flexibility-for-flexibility*). Employees' work-life balance was facilitated better in Flexible/favourable firms compared to Flexible/contradictory firms because long hours of work were performed less frequently by employees in the former group.

Previous research tends to presume that FWPs available through good HR policies lead or should lead to positive working environments for employees and that FWPs available informally lead to negative working environments for employees. This chapter shows otherwise. Neither formal nor informal FWPs led to positive or negative outcomes for employees all of the time. This variation can be explained through how class, age, and gender relations were negotiated. These intersections are discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter also showed how employees' experiences in small IT firms varied according to whether their place of employment developed FWPs and workplace

cultures with respect to working time along gender, class, and age lines. Elaboration on the contributions of this study is in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

This dissertation began with the following research question: How do small IT firms compare regarding the flexible workplace practices available and used by employees? Cross-firm comparisons are uncommon in the literature on FWPs. Typically past research involves either a quantitative analysis of individual-level data or a qualitative examination of a single large firm. The advantage of making comparisons across a number of small firms is that variation may emerge and be examined to determine if there are structural or individual factors that may account for the variation. Based on the conceptual framework used in this dissertation, the remaining research questions asked are the following. How do the behaviours of employees and rules established by management regarding the time and place of work compare among small IT firms? How do the past employment experiences of small IT firm owners affect their firms' offering and facilitation of flexible workplace practices? How do employees experience flexible workplace practices in small IT firms? Another research question emerged from the data and was presented in Chapter 5. It asked, how do the linked lives among family members of family-owned firms affect these FWPs? The next sections consider each of these research questions in turn.

This dissertation adds knowledge to sociological research on FWPs through its comparison of small IT firms, the potential sources of cross-firm variation in employing FWPs, and the experiences of employees in small firms. Findings are not generalizable to larger populations of small firms, regardless of industry, but this was not the study's intention. The case study approach used in this study involved theoretical and context based comparisons. Through these comparisons, different interconnections between

processes at multiple levels were illustrated that led to different combinations of FWPs and working time behaviours and rules among small firms. Below, I summarize the research findings of this study by the research questions mentioned. I then discuss the new insights gained from this dissertation. Its limitations and future research directions are also noted.

7.1 Classification of the Small IT Firms: Differences in Flexible Workplace Practices and the Time and Place of Work

Two ideal types of firms emerged from the data with regard to their FWPs: Rigid and Flexible (see section 4.1.4). In Rigid firms, few to none FWPs were used and if used, time-related conditions were attached. Conversely in Flexible firms, a more diverse range of FWPs were used with results-related conditions attached to them. How these firms differed theoretically will be discussed in subsequent sections as a contribution of this thesis.

Rigid and Flexible firms also differed by their working time behaviours and rules (see Table 4.4). The owners of Rigid firms utilized more direct management control strategies through formalizing power relations and organizing work around time. In contrast, the Flexible firm owners followed more indirect management control strategies through responsible autonomy. As noted throughout Chapters 5 and 6, the former approach is atypical in the IT industry and in small firms; this point will be discussed in the next section.

The working time behaviours and rules differed among Flexible firms so this type was split into two groups: Flexible/favourable firms and Flexible/contradictory firms.

Employees in Flexible/contradictory firms were more likely to work long hours and this made it difficult to experience the benefit of work-life integration that potentially follows FWPs. As noted earlier, Flexible/contradictory firms reflected the characteristics typical of IT firms more compared to the other firms. The differences between Flexible firms are explained later in this chapter.

7.2 Past Employment Experiences of Owners, Present Experiences of Employees, and Linked Lives in Family-Owned Firms

Variation between firm-types was shaped by owners' past employment experiences and structured social relations. Employees' experiences within these firms varied accordingly. Men predominated in Rigid firms, as did older employers and younger employees. The owners tended to work outside of the IT industry prior to their current positions and support a bureaucratic structure with restricting procedures in their own small firms, ergo, employees experienced rules limiting their use of FWPs and how they performed their work. In comparison, Flexible/favourable and Flexible/contradictory firm owners had typically worked in IT prior to their current positions. These firm owners utilized responsible autonomy as a management control strategy. Most of them experienced constraining hierarchies and time-related rules at some point in their careers; a few commented on the autonomy experienced in their previous place of employment prior to their current position. Compared to Flexible/contradictory firms, the owners and employees of Flexible/favourable firms tended to be older, women, and highly educated. Employees in both Flexible firms enjoyed autonomy in how they performed their work,

but the differences between Flexible firms had implications for their experiences and are discussed later in this chapter.

Employees' experiences of FWP varied according to their firms' workplace cultures in relation to working time. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is strong evidence for the influence of workplace culture on whether employees use FWPs. According to this literature, employees may be reluctant to use FWPs for the following inter-related reasons: they are expected to work long hours of work and/or be present at the office (face-time), they perceive negative repercussions for their individual careers, and their managers are unsupportive of the use of FWPs and/or employees' work-life balance (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008; Blair-Loy, 2004; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). In this study, working time rules and behaviours influenced whether FWPs were widely used by employees and/or whether employees could experience the positive benefits for their work-life balance that are expected to come from using FWPs. For instance, the high number of hours worked continuously by employees of Flexible/contradictory firms resulted in work being prioritized over employees' personal lives. Employees of this study knew what management expected of them with respect to when and where to work, and they followed these rules accordingly. Management's opinions about FWPs and employees' work-life balance were not explicitly sought out in this study because of how workplace culture was defined. Recall from Chapter 2 that there are different conceptualizations of and ways to study workplace culture in the literature (see section 2.2). In this dissertation, the focus was on the working time aspect of an organization's workplace culture and so management's rules about the time and place of work were assessed. These rules give insight into whether

management facilitated the use of FWPs and/or employees' work-life balance.

Management's opinions of FWPs and the work-life balance of their employees and themselves emerged in the data in relation to the owners' past and current employment experiences.

Some of the firms studied were family-owned. Variation arose among these particular firms according to their flexibility status. Among the five family-owned firms, two were Rigid, two were Flexible/favourable, and one was Flexible/contradictory. This variation can be explained through the linked lives of the spouses in them. The spouses in the Rigid firms had traditional divisions of labour over time and distributed the work responsibilities in their current firm along gender lines. In contrast, the spousal relations in Flexible/favourable firms emphasized equity. The linked lives of the spouses in the Flexible/contradictory firm resemble the ties in Rigid firms more than the ties in Flexible/favourable firms.

7.3 Contributions of this Dissertation

In this section I elaborate on the dissertation findings that add to the literature. This discussion highlights the individual and structural factors that explain the variation between Rigid, Flexible/favourable, and Flexible/contradictory firms, as well as employees' experiences. The first two sections concern the management control strategies used in study firms. Next, contributions to research on FWPs in small firms and in family-owned firms are discussed separately. Finally, additional insights for studying FWPs are noted.

7.3.1 Management Control Strategies in Small, Knowledge-Intensive Firms

The firms studied here were small and knowledge-intensive. As mentioned in Chapter 5, past research on these kinds of firms leads us to expect that workers' behaviours would be controlled through unstructured and indirect mechanisms (Benner, 2002; James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Ranson, 2003; Reich, 1992; Richardson, 2009; Sennett, 1998). Under these circumstances, workers would have a lot of responsibilities and/or some autonomy in their work activities. Yet in Rigid firms, formalized power relations and hierarchical divisions were present. Rigid firm owners employed direct controlling strategies over their workforce. Work was based on time and presence at work (or face-time). For example, FWPs were not available in an open-ended manner at Rigid firms, unlike in Flexible firms. If employees were absent from the office, they *owed* hours of work to the firm, regardless of whether full-time hours were worked. In an industry that is characterized as intensive, fast-paced, and project-based (Benner, 2002; Downie et al., 2004), long hours are not unusual, but neither are they usually formally mandated. Rigid firm owners followed a more 'direct control' rather than 'responsible autonomy' approach to management (Friedman, 1979).

Rigid firms also followed a rewards and discipline approach to control workers' behaviours that Edwards (1979) saw as being more typical of large-scale firms. According to Edwards, small firms are limited to simple forms of control due to their size; although he cautions that these strategies are not always effective. Simple forms include entrepreneurial and hierarchical control. Entrepreneurial control refers to situations when small firm owners oversee and direct all activities performed by workers, who have equal status among themselves. As firms grow in size, the beginnings of

hierarchies emerge whereby a few power divisions are made within a workforce. Both forms of simple control are unstructured and based on informality. In contrast, the Rigid firms in this study were more bureaucratized than the small firms described by Edwards. The formality involved in their rules and practices and the time-based control techniques set them apart, giving them a higher degree of control over their workers' behaviours compared to simple forms of control. In such a system, workers will not use FWPs for fear of being penalized and/or perceived as being unwilling to work additional hours for the firm.

The literature on control strategies in small and knowledge-intensive firms contrasts those apparent in Rigid firms. Possible explanations for this difference are presented in the two sections below. This variation was found because of the multiple case study approach used so some references to Flexible firms are made.

7.3.1.1 The lasting effects of structured social relations on the agency of powerful individuals

One explanation for why the circumstances of Rigid firms differ from the literature is that structured social relations have lasting effects on the agency of powerful individuals. Chapter 5 showed that the past employment experiences of Rigid and Flexible firm owners differed in their firms' offering and facilitation of FWPs at their respective small firms. This connection between past and present reflects the life course concept of the timing of lives/life stage that was discussed in Chapter 2. This concept illuminates the relationship between structure and agency over time.

The small firm owners' agency in how they offered and facilitated FWP in their current firms is inseparable from the structured social relations they confronted and experienced at their previous places of employment. For example, the time pressures that typically marked the past employment experiences of Flexible firm owners reflect how class relations were negotiated in ways that presumed workers will inherently disrupt the labour process without close supervision. As noted in Chapters 2 and 5, such pressures are also gendered and reflective of the expectations of younger workers whereby workers presumably can prioritize their working lives over their personal lives. At the time, these Flexible firm owners succumbed to these working time rules. But these owners also chose to change their circumstances when the time came to start their own company. They, and other Flexible firm owners discussed in Chapter 5, were motivated not to manipulate employees but rather to give them some autonomy in the conduct of their work.

Flexible firm owners resisted the way their previous places of employment were structured. Workers were trusted to perform their work activities without close supervision or direct involvement. This management approach is typical in IT and other knowledge-intensive industries (James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). Flexible firm owners differed, however, in their conformation or resistance to gender and age relations; this difference will be discussed in a section below.

The lasting effect of structured social relations on the agency of Rigid firm owners is reflected in their conformation to hegemonic structural expectations. Their lack of negative experiences in large companies did not trigger reflexive questioning of

organization of work of their previous places of employment. Rather, some modelled their HR policies and direct managerial practices after those of large organizations. Rigid firm owners seemed to mistrust employees and were not motivated to give them some autonomy in their work, unlike Flexible firm owners. In addition, Rigid firm owners on average did not work in IT immediately prior to their current position. Rigid firm owners were mostly older men, with women in family-owned firms being the exception. Their backgrounds and past employment experiences shaped how they managed their firms. Hegemonic class, age, and gendered expectations that are often embedded in contemporary workplaces were either considered acceptable or not questioned by Rigid firm owners who in turn conformed to them. Accordingly, responsible autonomy was not employed.

7.3.1.2 Paternalism: The intersection of class, age, and gender relations in rigid firms

Another reason why Rigid firms were uncharacteristic of IT and small firms is the intersection of class, age, and gender relations in them. Rigid firm owners tended to be older (median= late 40s/early 50s). Compared to younger owners, older owners may be more likely to act paternally towards workers (Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). But Rigid firm owners were not the only older owners in the sample. What is unique in Rigid firms, however, is the age difference between the older owners and younger workers (median= 30 years). Notably, owners and workers at these firms were mostly men (78 percent and 77 percent, respectively). Together, this age difference and male dominance at Rigid firms may have led owners not to trust their employees to work in the firms' interests. The inflexibility and rules about when and where work could be performed may reflect

paternalism. For instance, a Rigid firm owner commented in Chapter 5 that his firm had HR policies governing workers' behaviours with respect to how they dressed, talked to customers, and treated their colleagues at work. Possibly, these specific rules and procedures are considered as ways to make younger workers responsible workers. Unlike older workers who have commitments in their personal lives and are considered reliable, younger workers are presumed to be free of dependents (Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011) and thus, unreliable. Responsible autonomy, then, was not a desirable management control strategy for Rigid firm owners. Whether control was a response to the younger workforce or whether older workers stay away from Rigid firms to avoid management's direct control strategies, is difficult to discern. What is clear is the importance of considering the age dynamics in a firm when studying knowledge-intensive firms.

7.3.2 Responsible Autonomy: The Intersections of Class, Age, and Gender Relations among Flexible Firms

Another new insight gained from this study is with respect to the different implications of responsible autonomy for certain groups of skilled workers across firms. As noted in previous chapters, responsible autonomy is typically employed in knowledge-intensive firms in order to retain highly skilled workers, who possess the knowledge inherent in production (Clear & Dickson, 2005; Frenkel et al., 1995; Malone, 2004; Newell et al., 2002). From a feminist perspective, autonomy does not neutralize workplaces, an argument presented in Chapter 2. In IT, where variable and long hours of work are common (James, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008; Perrons, 2003; Shuey & Spiegel, 2010), ideal workers devote themselves to work and finish work in time for

deadlines regardless of the amount of hours required (Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008). An entrepreneurial masculinity is prevalent whereby workers will do whatever it takes for the firm to be competitive (Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; McMullin & Duerden Comeau, 2011). Such behaviours reproduce dominant gender and age relations whereby workers are presumed not to have dependents and can prioritize work. These literature findings support the working time behaviours and rules of Flexible/contradictory firms but contrast those of Flexible/favourable firms.

In Flexible/contradictory firms, workers were flexible for the firm through long hours of work more often than the firms were flexible back to employees. Past research supports this finding because of the dominant forms of youthfulness and masculinity present (see e.g., Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; MacEachen et al., 2008). For instance, a manager of the case example used in Chapter 6 commented that working “9 to 5” does not work in IT. He also suggested that the firm regularly needed “the guys to step up and ... [work] on the weekend or in [the] evening.” A programmer in this particular company made a similar comment and did not express experiences of work-life conflict despite having young children at home. Presumably, his wife took on the caregiving responsibilities so that he could “step up” and work long hours. As illustrated in Chapter 6, it seems as though women and individuals 40 years and older were unwilling to work at Flexible/contradictory firms. Considering of the dominance of youthfulness and masculinity, these firms may avoid hiring women and older workers (McMullin & Duerden, 2011; Ranson & Dryburgh, 2011). The only woman in an ownership position was in a family-owned firm, and as noted in Chapter 5, she had little

decision-making power because of the interdependent lives between her and her husband that involved a division of labour negotiated along gender lines. Flexible/contradictory firms negotiated structured social relations in ways that gave workers some autonomy in how work was conducted while reinforcing worker behaviours that were youthful, gendered, and masculinized. Accordingly, managerial control over workers' behaviours extended beyond work to the personal lives of workers whose work and personal lives were blurred in ways that favoured the firm (MacEachen et al., 2008). Under these circumstances, individuals with caregiving responsibilities would experience great difficulty working in these firms in the long-term.

Conversely, the working time behaviours and rules in Flexible/favourable firms made them relatively more appealing places of work for skilled women and individuals 40 years and older. These firms worked on the basis of *getting the work done* in time for deadlines. For some of these firms, meeting deadlines required workers to *be flexible* to the firm by working overtime. Compared to Flexible/contradictory firms and the picture of IT firms presented from the literature, Flexible/favourable firms had relatively more even reciprocal exchanges with their workers. The literature implies that the IT industry, like others, consider women and older individuals as undesirable workers because they presumably are not free of encumbrances and are unwilling to be flexible to the firm (Cooper, 2000; Duerden Comeau & Kemp, 2011; McMullin & Duerden Comeau, 2011). In the sample, these particular workers were small in numbers and yet most worked in Flexible/favourable firms. These firms suited their needs. For instance, a woman employee of the case example in Chapter 6 claimed she remained at her current place of employment despite opportunities elsewhere because the owners "value[d] work-life

balance over anything else.” She did not “stress about” any need to use FWPs in order to fulfill responsibilities in her personal life.

Although on average Flexible/favourable firms owners and workers were men, women were more likely to be owners and workers in these firms compared to others; this difference was clear when family-owned firms were excluded. In Flexible/favourable firms, including family-owned firms, women held powerful positions which are indicative of the blurred gender expectations at these firms. Additionally, the personal lives of workers (and owners) were acknowledged and valued, as stated above by an employee of the case example firm. In Flexible/favourable firms, workers and owners tended to describe the use of FWPs in relation to familial reasons. For example, recall that a different employee of the case example firm in Chapter 6 negotiated a four day work-week with the firm owners so that she could have more time for her family needs. In Flexible/favourable firms, gender and age relations were negotiated in ways that supported equity among men and women of different ages and life stages.

The differences between the two kinds of Flexible firms illustrate variation in how class relations intersect with gender and age relations. Resisting hegemonic class expectations through responsible autonomy does not lead to one outcome. To say, however, that Flexible/favourable firms gave workers more autonomy in their work than owners of Flexible/contradictory firms is misleading. Recall from Chapter 2 that Friedman (1977, 2000) noted a contradiction inherent in this management control strategy. The autonomy given to workers in how they conduct their work obscures their actual lack of control over the labour process. Once employees make demands that are

not in the firm's interest, management will abandon indirect strategies for more direct strategies to control the workforce (Friedman, 1977, 2000).

The contradiction mentioned above was evident in both kinds of Flexible firms. As shown in Chapter 6, workers could choose when and where to perform their work but had no control over their workloads, which were sometimes high and required long hours of work. In the five Flexible/favourable firms where employees rarely worked overtime, employees only had to *get their work done* in exchange for using FWPs. As noted in Chapter 4, three of these firms appeared to be struggling to obtain enough work to keep employees employed on a full-time basis. The possibility of management supervising more closely and formalizing rules of conduct, however, did not seem likely at the time of the study. In Chapter 6, employees described the flexibility of their employers and the associated reciprocal exchanges positively – they consented to the firms' conditions. Further, the exchanges found in Flexible firms are instances of market risks of firms being transferred onto workers. Presumably, these risks will likely discourage workers from making demands that are not in the firms' interests and that would trigger the employment of more direct management control strategies.

Flexible/favourable firms appear more desirable for women and individuals 40 years and older, not because they gave employees greater autonomy but rather that gender and age relations were negotiated with class relations in more equitable ways compared to the intersections in Flexible/contradictory firms.

7.3.3 Flexible Workplace Practices in Small Firms

This study fills in some of the gap in knowledge regarding FWPs in small firms. As noted previously, research on this topic finds that FWPs are less likely to be available to employees in these firms compared to large firms (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Ferrer & Gagné, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2010; Kalleberg et al., 1996; Pitt-Catsouphes, & Litchfield, 2001; Swanberg et al., 2005; Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). Also when available, FWPs tend to be offered through informal negotiations with managers or owners rather than formal HR policies (Dex & Scheibl, 2001; Lewis & Cooper, 2005; Pohlmann & Dulipovici, 2004). Until this dissertation, how decisions about FWPs are made and how the power difference between owners and workers affects the use of FWPs in the context of small firms were unexplored. I discuss these contributions to the literature by comparing my findings to those on large firms

7.3.3.1 Decisions regarding FWPs in small firms

One contribution to the knowledge on FWPs in small firms is with respect to how decisions are made. This aspect of FWPs was identified as a research gap by some scholars referenced in Chapter 1 (see Zeytinoglu et al., 2009), although some insight can be gained from the literature. Managers are typically the gatekeepers to the use of FWPs (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008; Gerson & Jacobs, 2001; Hochschild, 1997; Thompson et al., 1999). As noted earlier in this chapter, employees may be reluctant to use FWPs if their managers value a high number of hours worked and presence at the office (face-time) (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008; Blair-Loy, 2004; Gerson & Jacobs, 2001; Hochschild, 1997; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). Use is also limited

when managers are not supportive of workers' work-life balance (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008). Possibly, managers who discourage the use of FWPs and who are not accommodative of workers' family needs may lack personal experience of the challenges involved in balancing work and family responsibilities (Hochschild, 1997). This notion has not been widely documented with empirical research. This past research implies that employees of the same company have different circumstances for using FWPs if they do not have the same manager. Until this thesis, the context of small firms has not typically been considered.

In the small firms of this study, owners were the gatekeepers to FWPs. The circumstances somewhat differ from those implied in the literature above. The owners decided not only whether to facilitate employees' use of available FWPs (like managers do in large firms) but also whether and how to offer FWPs to their employees. As described earlier, owners' offering and facilitation of FWPs in their own firms were influenced by their respective past employment experiences and the lasting effects of structured social relations. Also, past work-life negotiations and related experiences affected the management approach of Flexible/favourable firm owners. For instance, some faced work-life challenges when past employers insisted they prioritize work. On average, Flexible/favourable firm owners acknowledged workers' personal lives through the FWPs and working time rules of the firm. Accordingly, workers were able to gain the work-life balance benefits that presumably follow FWPs. The connection between the owners' personal work-family negotiations and whether they supported the use of FWPs was also evident in the family-owned firms across firm-types; these findings are discussed in a separate section below devoted to family-ownership and FWPs.

7.3.3.2 Class relations

This dissertation also contributes to the knowledge of how power differences between owners and workers affect the use of FWPs in small firms. Past research on large firms finds that employees with access to FWPs do not use them if they fear repercussions for their individual careers from their managers (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008; Collinson & Collinson, 2004; Blair-Loy, 2004; Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Sharone, 2004; Thompson et al., 1999). These consequences are in relation to their job advancement and performance reviews. For instance, workers may be required to take a demotion in position or a cut in pay for using FWPs (Lewis & Smithson, 2009; Lewis & Taylor, 1996; Peper et al., 2009). In this dissertation, owners were who employees approached if FWPs were not available in an open-ended manner. These class relations involve greater power differences compared to the relations between managers and workers. Consequently, different implications result for workers. Although variable, concerns for one's individual career were found among the small study firm employees. As shown below, the power differences between owners and workers seemed to make career consequences intense and risky for workers.

In Rigid firms, workers seemed uneasy about requesting to use FWPs. The power difference between them and the owners cannot be ignored as a contributing factor. As illustrated in Chapter 6, employees of Rigid firms were the only respondents who complained about the inflexibility of their employers. Despite their discontent, these employees did not imply that they made attempts to request FWPs from the firm owners. The career repercussions employees feared may have been their job security. For

instance, employees of the firm used as a case example in Chapter 6 did not use their option of submitting concerns to a company HR email address because they knew the CEO checked it; employees did not want to appear as complainers. Employees did not have a third party, such as HR personnel, to go to, as employees typically do in large firms (see Kalleberg et al., 1996). This email option did not seem available in other Rigid firms where the only option was to approach owners face-to-face in order to make requests or suggestions about FWPs. In Chapter 5, it was suggested that employees needed to be made comfortable in small firms so they would approach owners with work-related issues. As shown in Chapter 6, this comfort was not evident in Rigid firms.

In Flexible firms, the power difference between owners and workers did not discourage workers from requesting to use FWPs. Owners did not use direct control strategies, and hence, employees were comfortable at these small firms. These power relations, however, appeared to influence the reciprocal exchanges that occurred for the use of FWPs. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, owners gave workers some autonomy in how they conducted their work. As a result, owners indirectly convinced them to work in the interests of the company by *being flexible* through overtime hours and/or *getting their work done* in time for firms' deadlines. The employees of the two firms used as case examples in Chapter 6 described these exchanges in naturalized, matter-of-fact ways. Employees considered reciprocal exchanges as a part of a social contract with the owners whereby both parties benefited. Career consequences ensued for these employees in the forms of high workloads and a high number of hours. In some Flexible firms, potential job loss was looming if firms did not generate enough workload. In contrast to what the

literature suggests, these career consequences did not directly result from managerial pressure to demonstrate ideal behaviours.

Reciprocal exchanges are typical when FWPs are used on an informal basis, according to past research based on large firms (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Hall & Atkinson, 2006; Holt & Thaulow, 1996; Wharton et al., 2008). Yet doing something in return for a small firm owner, as opposed to a manager of a larger firm, differs because of the higher dependence on employees. In the context of IT, the career consequences noted above may result because of the transfer of the firm's market risks, such as intense competition, onto workers. This transfer is a trend characteristic of the new economy (Benner, 2002; Downie et al., 2004; Shuey & O'Rand, 2004). Further research is needed on the FWPs in small firms to clarify the consequences of this power difference.

7.3.4 Flexible Workplace Practices in Family-Owned Businesses

As noted previously in Chapter 5, the limited research on FWPs in family-owned firms lead us to expect that the family-owned firms in this study would be classified as Rigid. According to this past research, family-owned firms operate on an inward thinking basis whereby employees are expected to adopt owners' work behaviours by sacrificing their family lives for their work lives (de Kok et al., 2006; Moshavi & Koch, 2005). The five family-owned firms in this study varied in their relative flexibility. Methodological differences between my research and this past research were noted in Chapter 5. Below, I elaborate on the contributions of this study through the benefits of examining linked lives among family members. Recall that the family members of these study firms were spouses.

The inflexibility and inward thinking found in research concurs with the FWPs developed at two of the five family-owned study firms. This study's focus on linked lives, however, enables an explanation that could not be provided in the literature. The correspondence occurs because the spouses of these two Rigid firms had divisions of labour that were negotiated along gender lines over time. Consequently, the husbands experienced their work and family lives separately while their wives buffered any potential work-life challenges. At their current firms, the husbands made the business decisions, and hence the lack of FWPs used at these firms parallel the husbands' work experiences and linked lives with their wives. This traditional relationship explains why owners would presume workers could prioritize their working lives over their family lives easily. As discussed in Chapter 5, the linked lives in the Flexible/contradictory family-owned firm were more like those in Rigid than in Flexible/favourable family-owned firms because gender was negotiated in traditional ways.

Past research contrasts with the remaining family-owned firms of this study that were classified as Flexible/favourable. The linked lives of Flexible/favourable firm owners involved more egalitarian divisions of labour over time. The husbands and wives had equal decision-making power in their current ownership positions. Only one of these couples had children. This particular husband and wife shared their caregiving responsibilities; one did not take more time away from work than the other. Their work-life experiences were reflected in the firms' flexibility for employees and their acknowledgment and integration of employees' personal lives with the firm's working time behaviours and rules. This connection challenges the presumption made in the literature that there is only one kind of inward thinking in family-owned firms. Family

members in family-owned firms can prioritize their personal lives and accordingly, presume that workers want to use FWPs or not work long hours for work-life balance reasons.

Differences between family-owned firms described above help explain the gender distribution of owners between firm-types. Recall from Chapter 4 that once family-owned firms were omitted, Rigid firms had relatively fewer female owners compared to Flexible/favourable firms. This study finds that family-owned firms need to be controlled for because female owners of these firms may hold less power than do their male counterparts. For instance, the female owners of Rigid family-owned firms lacked decision-making power over the FWPs and working time rules at their firms. Their husbands, who were their co-owners, held the power. This power distribution among Rigid family-owned firms contrasted that of Flexible/favourable family-owned firms.

7.3.5 Studying Flexible Workplace Practices

The literature on FWPs tends to focus on the practices that are available and used through HR policies. This focus neglects informal practices and reflects the bias that good HR policies lead to better working environments and work-life integration for the greater number of employees. There is a concern among scholars that FWPs negotiated informally are not necessarily available to all employees. Thus, FWPs available through HR policies either alone (Lewis & Lero, 2008) or supplemented with informal negotiations (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Wharton et al., 2008) are considered best practices in order to accommodate employees' diverse needs. But, my research shows that neither formal nor informal FWPs necessarily lead to entirely positive working environments.

The one firm that had FWPs available through HR policies was Rigid and utilized direct management control strategies, such as face-time. All of the study firms offered FWPs to employees informally and yet, much variation occurred in relation to their flexibility status and the working time aspect of their workplace cultures. As shown above, how class, age, and gender were negotiated influenced whether formal or informal FWPs were available to all and whether the use of them was facilitated or constrained. In addition to debating whether FWPs should be available through HR policies or informal negotiations, discussions on the sources and factors influencing employees' experience of them should be considered.

My study also overcomes methodological shortcomings in the research on FWPs in the workplace. It provides a comparative look, and combines web-survey data with case study comparisons and interview data from both employees and employers. As a result, this study avoids the tendency to consider firms as either unique or the same (see King et al., 2009). These multiple data sources provide information relating to FWPs available and used through either formal HR policies or informal negotiations; the latter is not often addressed in the literature (Atkinson & Hall, 2009; Golden, 2008). Also, employees were able to describe FWPs in their own words through the semi-structured in-depth interviews. In this study, employees considered sick days as a FWP which is not typically documented as such in the literature (see e.g., Hill et al., 2008). This study exemplifies how the resulting complexities and contradictions from a case study approach are informative of the processes and interactions underlying FWPs and employees' experiences of them.

7.4 Limitations

This dissertation has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. Methodological limitations of this study were discussed in Chapter 3. Below, I discuss limitations more specific to my analysis and findings.

The small firms of this study were situated in the IT industry. It is possible that the FWP and workplace cultures of small firms in other industries are quite different. The IT industry is considered an exemplar of the new economy because risk, opportunity, and uncertainty are at the fore (Duerden Comeau, 2003; Ranson, 2003). This context may have influenced the high workloads and continuous or periodic long hours of work among some of the study firms. Also, the management control strategy of responsible autonomy may not be as commonly used by firms in other industries.

The FWPs in this study reflect the FWPs often identified in research (see e.g., Hill et al., 2008). These practices, however, may reflect the preferred work-life accommodations of the dominant European ethnic group in Canada. Workplaces are typically organized in ways that advantage workers who are of European descent (see Creese, 2007; Das Gupta, 1996). Thus, we should not presume that FWPs are neutral in this regard. Canadian workers and their families have diverse ethnic backgrounds. Future studies should explore whether other practices are preferable across different ethnic groups. For instance, what kind of FWPs would best suit employees who negotiate their working and non-working lives in a collectivist manner? This study would need to involve qualitative methods that would allow respondents to describe preferred practices or alternative work arrangements in their own words.

Another limitation of this study's findings concerns time. This study considered the timing of individuals' lives but not the firm's timing. FWPs and accompanying workplace cultures were analyzed as static practices. A firm's offering and facilitation of FWPs in the past may give some indication of the current circumstances. For instance, the IT industry experienced a boom and a bust shortly before the small IT firms were studied. The firms studied were successful in surviving, for the time being, in the market, but whether their FWPs and workplace cultures changed in the midst of these market changes would enhance our current understandings of the sources of FWPs in small IT firms. These limitations point to future research directions, which I expand on in the next section.

7.5 Future Research Directions

The previous sections of this chapter discussed the contributions and limitations of my thesis. I now make suggestions for future research flowing from these discussions. The findings of my study lead me to ask further questions about FWPs in small firms.

This thesis studied FWPs in small firms operating in the IT industry. Possibly, the circumstances of this industry are somewhat unique. The intensification of work and blurred boundaries of work and personal time, however, are trends in the world of work (Burchell et al., 2002; Presser, 2003). Longer hours are also being worked by employees in professional and lower status positions in current times compared to in previous decades (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). For these reasons, and the variation found among the small IT firms in this study, other industries may not involve completely different circumstances for small firms and their employees. Nonetheless, comparing small firms

in another industry would help address the effect of this industry on small firms. This research should focus on a single industrial context to facilitate cross-firm comparisons and consider the career trajectories of the small firm owners in relation to the offering and facilitation of FWP of their respective firms.

Future research on FWPs in small firms might also be conducted to clarify the implications of the power difference between owners and employees. This research may help us understand how vulnerable employees in small firms are as a result of having a direct relationship with the owners. It may also shed additional light on the reciprocal exchanges that occur in small firms for using FWPs that are available in informal ways.

Also helpful would be to examine FWPs and employees' experience of them over time in the context of small firms. This research may uncover additional sources of FWPs in small firms, particularly when and why they develop over time. Examining a small firm over time would also help consider market fluctuations and the influence of this on the working time expectations and workloads of workers. During a boom period, for example, the market demand of skilled workers is high and consequently, employers may be motivated to facilitate the use of FWPs and give employees some autonomy in how they perform their work activities. Possible limitations due to resource constraints and sampling attrition for cross-firm analyses over time could be addressed by limiting the number of assessments and span of years studied. Research into all of these areas mentioned would help understand the workplace context of small firms.

7.6 Conclusions

The final chapter discussed the main contributions of this dissertation. These contributions illustrate how the small IT firms of this dissertation differ in theoretically important ways. Two of the new insights made concerned the variation among firms in their management control strategies. Some firms employed direct controlling strategies, whereas other firms employed indirect controlling strategies. The former group of firms contrasts the literature on small and knowledge-intensive firms, as discussed. Among the latter group of firms, different implications arose for employees based on the different intersections of class, age, and gender relations in these firms. Other contributions of this dissertation are specific to the literature on flexible workplace practices (FWPs). Insight into the context of small firms is gained from findings on how decisions about FWPs are made and how the power difference between owners and employees affects the use of FWPs. These issues created somewhat different circumstances within the small firms studied here and the large firms in the literature. A fourth contribution is the variability of FWPs available and used in family-owned firms. Some of the family-owned firms in this dissertation were flexible for employees and this contrasts the limited literature on this ownership. The linked lives between spouses over time revealed how personal experiences influence whether the availability or use of FWPs is supported by owners. The fifth and final contribution noted that variable outcomes are associated with formal and informal FWPs. Neither FWPs available through HR policies or informal negotiations lead entirely to a positive work environment. Also, informal FWPs are not always equitable or inequitable for all employees in a firm. Limitations of the findings and analyses of this dissertation were noted, along with suggestions for future research.

This dissertation has added to the sociological knowledge on FWPs by attending to multiple dimensions at different levels of analysis. The intersection of gender, class, and age relations structured the FWPs and the related working time behaviours and rules of the small firms studied here. Variation occurred depending on whether hegemonic expectations were conformed to or resisted. The firm owners' timing of lives/life stage and agency were also influential factors that structured the opportunities available for employees to use FWPs. The linked lives among family members in family-owned firms also shaped these opportunities. Employees' experiences varied accordingly. In order for greater flexibility among small firms, both structural and individual changes need to take place.

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Appendix A: Employment Regulations in Ontario and Alberta

In response to the work-life challenges that single- and dual-earner families experience, some countries particularly in Europe, have changed their employment regulations in the past decade. In Britain, parents of children under 6 years old, or children under 18 years old who have disabilities, have the legal right to request FWPs and employers are obligated to take these requests under serious consideration (see Todd, 2004).²⁰ France reduced its normal work-week to 35-hours a week (see Fagnani & Letablier, 2004); but a change in political power (from socialist to conservative) and the recent recession instigated new legislation that enables companies to require workers to work longer than 35-hours a week without having to compensate workers with days off (Crumley, 2008). Parallel changes to work-weeks or employment regulations have not occurred in Canada.

In Canada, employment standards fall under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. The exceptions include the Canada Labour Law, which applies only to federal employees and employees in sectors that are federally regulated,²¹ and the Employment Insurance (EI) Act and Regulations, which offers monetary benefits to eligible employees for certain leaves from work. Because the firms in this study are located in Ontario and Alberta, I review aspects of Ontario's Employment Standards Act (ESA) and Alberta's Employment Standards Code (Code) related to hours of work and leaves from work.

²⁰ These FWPs include annualized hours (within boundaries employees choose the days and hours of performing work based on the number of hours expected in a year, month, or on a bi-weekly basis), compressed work-week hours, flex-time, job-sharing, shift work, unpaid leave, and staggered hours.

²¹ Federally regulated sectors include banks; marine shipping, ferry and port services; air transportation; railway and road transportation that involves crossing provincial or international borders; canals, pipelines, tunnels and bridges crossing provincial borders; telephone, telegraph and cable systems; radio and television broadcasting; grain elevators, feed and seed mills; uranium mining and processing; businesses dealing with the protection of fisheries as a natural resource; many First Nation activities; most federal Crown corporations; and private businesses necessary to the operation of a federal act.

Ontario's ESA and Alberta's Code both limit the number of working hours that are required of employees. Ontario's ESA restricts employers from establishing hours of work that exceed eight hours a day or 48 hours a week (Service Ontario, 2000); exceptions require permission from the Director of Employment Standards or an employer-employee agreement that specifies the amount of hours per week or day. In comparison, Alberta's Code considers a regular work day and work-week to be eight hours and 44 hours, respectively (Province of Alberta, 2010). If employees' hours of work exceed these times, employers are required to pay employees overtime; or, in lieu of overtime pay, time can be taken off if stated in an agreement between the employer and employee and if the banked time is no longer than 3 months. In both Alberta's Code and Ontario's ESA, particular industries and professions are exempt from these overtime regulations, including information system professionals, managers, and supervisors.²²

Alberta's code also restricts some employers from requiring their employees to work for 12 consecutive hours unless an accident or unforeseeable circumstance occurs or

²² Other exceptions in Alberta's Code include individuals employed in a confidential capacity; farm workers; professionals, including agrologists, architects, certified or chartered accountants, chiropractors, dentists, denturists, engineers, lawyers, students-at-law, optometrist, podiatrists, psychologists and veterinarians; salespersons of automobiles, trucks, buses, farm machinery, road construction equipment, heavy duty equipment, manufactured homes or residential homes; salespersons who solicit orders, principally outside of the employer's place of business, who are fully or partly paid by commission (this does not apply to route salespersons); licensed salespersons of real estate and securities; licensed insurance salespersons who are paid entirely by commission income; salespersons who are at least 16 years old and are engaged in direct selling for licensed direct sellers; licensed land agents; extras in a film or video production; counselors or instructors at an educational or recreational camp that is operated on a charitable or not-for-profit basis for children, persons with disabilities, or religious purposes; and domestic employees. Other exemptions in Ontario's ESA include employees who are firefighters; fishing or hunting guides; in construction; superintendents, janitors or caretakers of a residential building who reside in the building; embalmers or funeral directors; landscape gardeners; install and maintain swimming pools; grow of mushrooms; grow flowers for the retail and wholesale trade; grow, transport, and lay sod; grow trees and shrubs for the wholesale and retail trade; breed and board horses on a farm; the keeping of furbearing mammals for propagation or the production of pelts for commercial purposes; or are in the recorded visual and audio-visual entertainment production industry.

permission from the Director of Employment Standards is gained.²³ Alberta's Code and Ontario's ESA allows many exemptions from their hours of work regulations through either extensive lists or broadly acknowledging employer-employee agreements. It is seemingly easy for employers to overcome legal obstacles of hours of work.

The vacation time entitled to employees varies slightly by province. In Ontario, employers are required to provide employees with at least two weeks of vacation a year after each year of employment (Service Ontario, 2000). Employers in Alberta are required to give employees two weeks of vacation after a year of employment for the first four years and then three weeks of vacation after five consecutive years of employment (Province of Alberta, 2010).²⁴

The conditions and length of time employees are entitled to maternity, parental, sickness, and compassionate leaves are provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Monetary benefits for eligible employees on these leaves are given by the federal government through Canada's Employment Insurance (EI) (Service Canada, 2011). In order to be eligible for EI, employees on these particular leaves must have experienced a decline in their weekly earnings by more than 40 percent and accumulated 600 insured hours in the last 52 weeks or since their last EI claim. These annualized hours are the equivalent of working about 11 ½ hours a week for 52 weeks. Based on this criterion, some temporary workers may not be covered. Until recently, the self-employed were not eligible, with the

²³ Certain occupations and industries are exempt from this regulation. They include employees in construction, or who are licensed or registered salespersons of real estate and securities, commission salespersons who solicit orders principally outside the place of business of their employer, farm employees, extras in a film or video production, or licensed insurance salespersons who are paid entirely by commission incomes.

²⁴ Occupations exempt from this regulation of the Alberta Code include construction, licensed or registered salespersons of real estate and securities, commission salespersons who solicit orders principally outside the place of business of their employer, farm employees, extras in a film or video production, or licensed insurance salespersons who are paid entirely by commission incomes. There were no corresponding exceptions in Ontario's ESA.

exception of those who were covered by the Québec Parental Plan (Service Canada, 2011). The *Fairness for the Self-Employed Act* enables the Canadian self-employed to be eligible to receive benefits for maternity, parental, sickness, and compassionate leaves if they pay EI premiums and adhere to the criteria set for employees that was previously noted (Service Canada, 2011).

The paid monetary EI benefits are capped at 55 percent of average insurable earnings up to a yearly maximum of \$44,200 in 2011.²⁵ Low income families whose family net income is at most \$25, 921 and who already receive a Canada child tax benefit may be given a higher percentage of their insurable earnings. The current maximum benefit for all Canadian employees is \$468 per week. These monetary benefits are taxable income. Employees can receive paid maternity benefits for up to 15 weeks, paid parental benefits for up to 35 weeks, and paid sickness benefits for up to 15 weeks. Employees can also receive EI for compassionate care leaves for up to 6 weeks in order to provide care for or support a gravely ill family member who risks death within 26 weeks; this paid leave is for a maximum of 6 weeks. The particular family members who are covered vary by province and territory. These family members in Ontario's ESA include an employee's spouse, parent, child, grandparent, sibling, or other relatives who are dependent on the employee for care or assistance. Alberta's Code did not specify such family members for compassionate care.

As mentioned, provincial and territorial legislation protects the jobs for employees on these leaves; employers are required to give employees the same job before leave was taken or a comparable job (Province of Alberta, 2010; Service Ontario, 2000). The length of job-protected leave and eligibility criteria vary by this provincial and

²⁵ This maximum income bracket is calculated annually.

territorial legislation. Ontario's ESA entitles employees to 17 weeks of pregnancy leave and 35 to 37 weeks of parental leave if they have been employed by their current employer for at least 13 weeks (Service Ontario, 2000); birth mothers who took pregnancy leave are entitled to 35 weeks of parental leave. Parental leave is available to employees who have a newborn child or who are gaining custody of a child for the first time. The ESA also entitles employees to personal medical (or sickness) leave of up to 10 days for an employee's personal illness, injury, or medical emergency, as well as the death, illness, or medical emergency of an employee's relative. Small firms that employ fewer than 50 employees are exempt from this regulation.

In comparison, Alberta's Code entitles employees to take 15 weeks of pregnancy leave and 37 weeks of parental leave if they have been employed by their current employer for at least 52 weeks (Province of Alberta, 2010). Parental leave can be taken in the event of a child's birth or an adoption of a child under the age of 18 years. The Code did not include personal medical or sickness leaves.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) takes the position that regulations on hours of work and different kinds of leaves (e.g., maternity, parental, and sick leaves) do not consider the needs of smaller businesses (Charron & Piché, 2005). The CFIB is a not-for-profit organization for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It argues that employees are in a better position to discuss employment conditions with their employer, especially with a shortage of skilled labour, compared to employees in the 1960s when initial employment regulatory laws were formulated (Charron & Piché, 2005). According to CFIB, there should be a greater emphasis on the responsibilities of employees who "can affect the viability of the business" (Charron &

Piché, 2005: 4). The CFIB specifically targets the Canadian Labour Code but this legislation only applies to federal employees or, 10 percent of small businesses (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSDC], 2011). Their arguments, however, can be considered against any employment standards act or code. In Ontario and Alberta, small firms are legally obligated to give their employees at least two weeks of paid vacation a year if employed for one year. They also are obligated to allow unpaid maternal and parental leaves. Small firms are not, however, required to provide employees with sick leave. They can also avoid hours of work regulations through either employer-employee agreements in Ontario or by hiring employees whose occupation is exempted from the Code in Alberta. The policy context in Ontario and Alberta does not necessarily burden SMEs.

Appendix B: WANE Interview Guide

Qualitative Interview Instrument for Small Firms

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. It should take about an hour. Do you have any questions?

We are required to get your consent before we start. This interview is voluntary, you can refuse to answer any questions and this information is completely confidential. {Sign consent}.

Because it is difficult for me to write down everything that you say, I'd like to tape record it. Of course, everything that you say is confidential. The tape will be transcribed and then erased.

I'd like to begin by asking you a few questions about you and your firm/job.

1. How did you get into IT?
[educational background; role models; mentors; key life transitions].
 So that would make you how old?
[clarify sequence of events; ask ages at various points in story]
2. Please tell me about your job.
[What do you do in a typical day?]
3. What do you like/dislike about your current job?
4. Since you've been working here, have you ever thought about changing jobs for any reason?
[Probe for reason, probe for why change not made.]
5. I understand from our previous conversations that your firm...
 Please tell me a bit more about this.
[What is the history of the firm? What is your product? What makes your product unique? Who are your clients?]
6. How is it being financed?
[This could be through self-financing/partnership agreement; private investors; venture capital]
7. Please tell me about the organizational structure of your company
[flat or hierarchical structures; how is authority distributed; what is the reporting structure like; how are decisions made]
8. How would you describe the 'work' or 'office' culture at this firm?
[Probe: Is there a type of office culture that the company hopes to

achieve? What is the relationship between management and/or owners and employees like? Is it formal or informal? Could an employee easily approach management/owners about personal problems or changes in work-load? Do they socialize at work or outside of work?]

9. When a job/position opens up in your company, how do you typically find a good candidate?

[Probe: Are there any policies in place at this company to attract 'ideal' or 'first choice' candidates for IT positions? How important is experience and/or educational achievement?]

10. Recruitment (if applicable): What type of worker is the 'first choice' or best candidate for IT companies/your firm at this time? Do some workers offer a better 'fit' for IT work and/or the workplace culture in IT?

[Probe: Do you think there are preferences for certain: age, gender, race, educational levels? What are the up and coming skills needed in IT?]

11. Retention/Turnover (if applicable): Please tell me about employee turnover at your firm.

[Probe: How long do employees tend to stay on average? Why do employees leave the company? Are there any policies or incentives in place to reduce or increase employee turnover? Are some positions more difficult to fill or retain? What are the credentials required for these positions? How do you handle staff shortages?]

12. Could you please describe successful IT employee?

[Probe: What do workers have to do to be successful in IT? What kind of commitment is required? What qualities do they possess? What types of skills are most important to this company? e.g. business skills, technical skills, management skills, customer relations, etc.]

13. Skills: In your view, how important is up-skilling or ongoing skill development in IT work? If employees want to up-grade or improve their skills at your company, how would they go about doing this?

[Probe: Are these available to all employees e.g. any age or seniority restrictions? Do some positions need more training or skill development than others? Does up-skilling have any bearing on employee performance or compensation?]

14. HR: What efforts has this company made to make the work environment appealing to employees? What has this involved? Who has this appealed to?

[Probe: physical changes- lighting, work-space, music, work activities, newsletters, family days, dress code changes, social events]

15. Are there any HR policies in place in this firm? (e.g. pension benefits; sick leave; health benefits; etc). Would you like to see any specific HR policies put in place?

- Are there any ways in which your workplace could be improved?
16. Does your company have any policies in place to help employees combine their work and other things that are going on in their lives? Does this company accommodate employees during life transitions (e.g. parenthood)? Would you call this company ‘family-friendly’?

[Probe: parental leave, flexible hours, elder care, training compensation, teleworking, sabbatical, retirement planning, pensions, part-time work, job-sharing, disability, child care]
 17. Aging Workforce/Older Workers: Do you see yourself working in IT for the rest of your life? Why or why not? Can a person build a career in IT? How long would it be? Is there any tendency for IT workers to gravitate to certain IT jobs as they age? One of the things that we noticed from our preliminary research is that the IT employment sector tends to be young relative to the overall work force. Do you have any sense of why that might be?

[Probe: Do you see any relationship between age and skill sets? Are age and promotion related in any way? Are life-long IT careers possible?]
 18. If you could design the perfect job for yourself, at this stage in your life, what would it be?

[Probe for job skills, hours, environment, etc.]
 19. Part of what this project considers is the ‘aging workforce’ and our view is that people begin to age as soon as they are born. As we age our priorities may change. What are the implications of this for IT workers?
 20. Throughout people’s lives they have experiences that can sometimes affect their work such as getting married, having children, and changing jobs. Have you experienced any of these or similar kinds of things? Have they affected your work? In what ways?
 21. IT Industry and Business Plans: How would you describe the current climate in Canadian IT business? How has changed over the last 10 years? How does the future look for the IT industry?

[Probe: How has/will this company adjusted to these changes?]
 22. I asked earlier what characterizes a successful IT employee. What do you think makes an IT firm successful?
 23. We’ve covered a lot of ground here. Can you think of anything else in regards to IT work that you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your time and for your participation in this study. When I review this information there may be something that I missed or need clarification on. If this is the case, would I be able to contact you again? Thank you for your time.

Appendix C: WANE Case Study Report Template

The purpose of the case study reports is to provide information that will be comparative across cases and across countries. Attached is a revised template that should serve as a guideline for writing these reports. If there is no information on a particular subject please make note of that. For instance, if there is no information on the history of the firm, please state: We were unable to collect data on the history of the firm.

Context

This should be the same information for each case study in a particular region. Cut and paste from one report to another.

1. *Country/Broader Regional IT Context*
 - a) Demographic
 - b) Economy (global and regional IT industry factors, growth and GDP, revenues and expenditures, research and development, global trade and import/export)
 - c) Size of region
 - d) Reliance on IT employment in other sectors
 - e) Stability of IT employment (firm size and tenure, IT labour market, employment turnover)
 - f) Training and positive mobility opportunities (e.g. government initiatives)
2. *IT landscape in local region and within larger context*
 - a) Demographic (local population, percentage of workers in IT)
 - b) Large employers, regional industries (outside of IT)
 - c) Regional IT specializations and distinctions
 - d) Characterization of IT labour market (e.g. downsizing, niche markets, short contracts)

Description of Firm

1. *History of firm, significant changes to firm* (e.g. in turnover, product line, staff profile, etc.)
2. *Distinctive features of the IT firm* (e.g. family run)
3. *IT niche* (e.g. product, services, clients and customer base)
4. *Demographic information about staff* (numbers, tenure, gender, age, ethnicity, education)
5. *Physical layout and design of IT operations*
6. *Spatial organization of staff and teams* (e.g. geographic dispersion, homeworking)

Methods

1. *Gaining access*
2. *Case study agreements* (to be included as an appendix; form signed, things promised)
3. *How were interviews negotiated?*

4. *How were web-survey invitations delivered?*
5. *Who & what was involved in the research visit?*
 - who was the gatekeeper
 - how many people were interviewed
 - the length of face-to-face meetings
 - number and type of observations
 - dates of site visit
6. *Any problems encountered before, during or after site visit?*

Findings

In each of the following sections, any variations by age, gender, and ethnicity/race should be highlighted.

1. *Employment relations*
 - Structure of the firm (divisions, hierarchies, ownership)
 - How work gets done (organization of tasks and projects, nature of IT work)
 - Workplace culture (i.e. workplace atmosphere; dress codes; worker interactions; team building)
 - Career management: attitudes to IT careers, sustaining IT careers, priorities, ambitions
2. *Life course*
 - Issues relating to the life course of the individual in relation to the firm
 - Significant events for individuals, and the effects on their IT careers: turning points
 - Employment insecurity: redundancy, the 2000-2001 downturn, off-shoring (Effects of industry and firm pressures on workers)
 - School to work/work to school transitions
 - Career transitions (e.g. entries and exits to and from profession and jobs)
 - Work-life balance
3. *HR issues*
 - Recruitment, retention, and turnover
 - Informal and formal training
 - Compensation systems (e.g. pay, facilities and discounts, etc.)
 - Health and safety
 - Retirement and pension
 - Redundancy
 - Holiday and leave
 - Flexible work arrangements
4. *Other*

- Any emerging themes that are particularly relevant to addressing our projects research questions.

Policy Concerns and Implications

1. *Challenges for the IT sector, for firms, and for workers*
2. *Equity issues*
3. *Work-life balance*
4. *Best practice & policy recommendations*

Appendix D: WANE Case Snapshot Template

International company #: Descriptive words

Specialization

Few sentences summarizing the firm (e.g., structure, relationships) from case study report.

- Points about the organization of the company, employer-employee relationships, workplace culture or atmosphere of firm, and any other noteworthy points

Firm Characteristics

Service/product offered
Location
Size of firm
Year formed
Ownership
Aliases
Gender composition	<i>(#) and (%)</i>
Racial/ethnic composition	<i># visible minorities, immigrants</i>
Age profile (as of 2005)	<i>mean= ; median= ; range</i>
Family profile	<i>% partnered (married/common-law)</i> <i>% parents</i>
Hours worked	<i>mean= hours/week; ~ for employees; ~ for management</i>
Education profile

Data Collection and Case Study

Team	<i>WANE leader name</i>
Major dates	<i>Negotiation meeting:</i> <i>Employee presentation:</i> <i>Qualitative interviews:</i>
Response rates	<i>MSI web surveys: (# participated / # asked to participate)</i> <i>Qualitative interviews: (# participated / # asked to participate)</i>
Case study author	<i>WANE member</i>
Additional material	<i>Archival material of this firm</i>

What's unique? (1-2 sentences on the unique features of this firm)

**Curriculum Vitae
Catherine E. Gordon**

Education

- 2007-current Ph.D. ABD., Sociology, The University of Western Ontario
London, ON, Canada
- 2006-2007 M.A., Sociology, The University of Western Ontario
London, ON, Canada
- 2002-2006 B.A. Honours, Specialization in Sociology,
The University of Western Ontario, London, ON, Canada

Academic Awards and Scholarships

- Western Graduate Research Scholarship, University of Western Ontario (2007-2011)
- Gold Medalist award for highest GPA in program (2006)
- Ontario Universities Athletic Academic Achievement Award (2003-2006)

Related Work Experience

- Sept-Dec 2011 Lecturer. Sociology of Aging (SOC2202).
The University of Western Ontario
- June 2011 Interviewer. Academica Group. London, ON.
Australian Student Recruitment Project. Directors: Peggy Sattler and Julie Peters
- Sept 2010-Apr 2011 Teaching Assistant. The University of Western Ontario
Sociology of Aging. (included four lectures)
Professor: Dr. Ingrid Connidis
- May-Aug 2010 Graduate Research Assistantship. The University of Western Ontario
American Sociological Association Section on the Sociology of Mental Health. Editor: Dr. William R. Avison
- June-Aug 2010 Project Analyst. The Research Park Sarnia-Lambton,
The University of Western Ontario. *Inter-generational Workforce Study*.
Director: Don Hewson
- Sept 2009-Apr 2010 Teaching Assistant. The University of Western Ontario
Social Problems. Professor: Gale Cassidy
Sociology of the Family. (included two lectures) Professor: Gale Cassidy

- June 2006- Graduate Research Assistantship. The University of Western Ontario
Apr 2009 *Workforce Aging and the New Economy*. Director: Dr. Julie McMullin
- May 2006- Graduate Research Assistantship. The University of Western Ontario
Aug 2007 *Multigenerational Families Study*. Director: Dr. Ingrid Connidis
- June 2006- Editorial Assistant. *Social Sciences Section of Canadian Journal on Aging*
Apr 2007 Editor: Dr. Ingrid Connidis

Research Contributions

Refereed Monographs

- 2009 McMullin, Julie Ann, Victor W. Marshall, Tammy Duerden Comeau, and Catherine Gordon. February. *Dilemmas of Owners and Workers in a Risk Society*. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN).
http://www.cprn.org/documents/51018_EN.pdf

Paper Presentations at Professional Meetings (refereed)

- 2012 Gordon, Catherine. "Flexible workplace practices in small firms: The case of IT workers." Paper presented at the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) Annual Meeting in Waterloo, Canada. May 29-June 2.
- 2008 Comeau, Tammy Duerden, Catherine Gordon, and Julie McMullin. "Risky Employment: The Case of IT Workers." Paper presented at the Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting of the Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) in London, Canada, October 23-26. [I presented]
- 2008 McMullin, Julie, Victor W. Marshall, Tammy Duerden Comeau, and Catherine Gordon. "Aging and Employment Relations: Dilemmas of Owners and Workers in a Risk Society." Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meetings in Boston, USA, August 1-4.
- 2007 Gordon, Catherine and Ingrid Connidis. "Negotiating Work-Family Balance: Inter- and Intra-Generational Case-Study Comparisons." Paper presented at the Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting of the Canadian Association on Gerontology in Calgary, Canada, November 1-3. [I presented]

Presentations at Conferences and Symposia

- 2008 Gordon, Catherine and Emily Jovic. "WANE FutureWork Toolkit" Association of Public Sector Information Professionals and the Canadian Information Processing Society, Summit – Premier Learning Event, Ottawa, Canada, May 7-9. [both presented]

2008 Gordon, Catherine and Heather Hanson. "Students and the Canadian Association on Gerontology." The Aging, Rehabilitation & Geriatric Care Research Centre (ARGC/FHS) Symposium in London, Ontario, February 8. [both presented]

Service and Other Experience

- Student member of Cluster on Population Change and the Life Course, The University of Western Ontario (2011-present)
- Student member of Centre for Population, Health and Aging (formerly the Aging and Health Research Centre), The University of Western Ontario (2007-present)
- Student mentor for new graduate students in the Department of Sociology, The University of Western Ontario (2009-2011)
- Student Representative of the Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG) Student Connection (SC-CÉ)
- Member of Planning Committee of Canadian Association on Gerontology, Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting (2007-2008)
- Co-chair of the Student Organizing Committee of Canadian Association on Gerontology, Annual Scientific and Educational Meeting (2007-2008)