

# Work-life balance in the UK police – understanding the challenges and opportunities

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# Work-life Balance

Who of you has thought about work-life balance?



# A child's view



# WLB – a Definition



“The individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual’s current life priorities” (Kalliath and Brough, 2008, p.326)

# Why am I concerned with WLB in my research?



- Big concern to employers – more important as a health concern than work-related stress (GriD, 2012)
- Regional variation in UK!
- Decades of research don't equal decades of good solutions

# UK Police: Challenges for WLB



Spending review → Operational and Organizational changes, regional variation

High risk job, work-family conflict potential cause for burnout

Bad press

Need to develop *research with practical implications*, “things are dire” mind-set not helpful for individuals

Need prevention and cure

# An officer in his words



# Gaps in WLB research

- Focus on conflict: linked to work and non-work outcomes, health and performance
- Little research on actual interventions
- Need more specific research on organisational contexts – much focus on professional dual earners
- Promising new areas:
  - Boundary styles. Volleyers, Integraters (Kossek et al., 2012)
  - Facilitation (Frone, 2003): apply skills in different areas of your life, transfer of learning

# Current research



- Understanding work-life balance as KSAs: what skills, knowledge and abilities do people need?
- Any difference between groups?
- Which KSAs are most important for the police?
- What can people do to facilitate their WLB?

# Method

Large modernising UK force



Behaviour  
elicitation  
through  
interviews

Card sort  
to cluster  
and  
refine

Survey  
analysis  
for initial  
validation

# Findings in summary

- Competencies ranged from broad to narrow
- Context specific: for instance NOT taking work home effective boundary management in this population – potentially confidential and also intrusive work
- All competencies important, for instance managing (others') expectations, managing flexibility, keeping things in perspective
- Separate competence for line managing WLB in others

# Implications



- Theoretical: WLB understood as KSAs, gap in the literature so far. Competencies models widely used in practice, not reflected in research to date
- Practical: screening, training, raising self awareness. Empowering, not limiting
- Future research: further validation, different occupations, is there a ‘global WLB KSA model’?

# The opportunities for the Police



- Practical applications of this research:
  - Screening
  - Training
  - Raising self awareness
- Empowering, not limiting
- Onus on the person and the organisation

# What I learned from this research



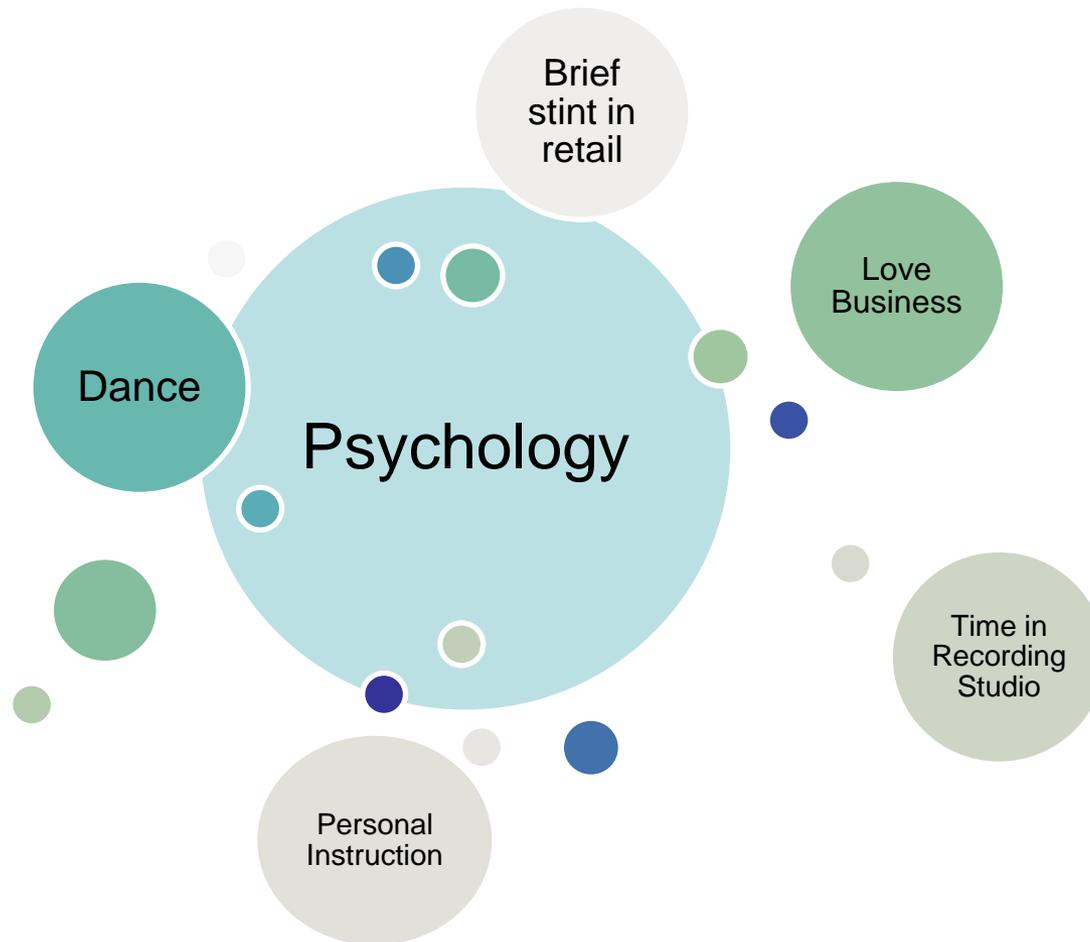
- Had to persevere to get it published
  - Can be tricky to try something new!
- Reflection on my WLB, and also reflection on assisting other organisations
- Renewed appreciation that policing is not an easy job!

# Bit about me

- Fulltime academic & consultant
- Chartered Psychologist
- Editor
- Chair Division of Occupational Psychology
- Set up working group on Work-life Balance in 2009 with Professor Gail Kinman



# My path to psychology



# My three top tips



- Study into psychology if you love people
- Consider occupational psychology if you love business
- Persevere and frame challenges as opportunities!

# Thank you!



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