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Management in the 24/7-society raises concerns of fairness and social responsibility

Abstract

Despite the pressure on work-family policies arising from the increase in nonstandard working times in various sectors, only a few studies have addressed management practices in 24/7 work places.

Purpose. This study investigates the challenges Finnish managers face in meeting the various tensions stemming from nonstandard working hours and services operating 24/7. Two typical 24/7 work contexts are focused: the hospitality and retail industries and flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care services (ECEC). The emphasis is on management practices relating to the planning of work shifts and children's care schedules.

Design. Study 1 comprises focus group interviews with middle managers (N=20) working in hotels, stores and service stations with restaurants and shopping facilities. Study 2 utilizes survey data on directors (N=20) of day care centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC.

Findings. The results showed that management in 24/7 workplaces raises issues of fairness and social responsibility. Managers in both sectors were faced with constantly varying service demands, leading further to changes and unpredictability in employee working times. Alongside organizational goals, the business managers reported needing to consider employee needs and the ECEC service directors the wellbeing of parents and children. They also reported seeking the most cost-effective way to deliver services at a time of budget cuts. Managers in both sectors complained about lack of formal, organizational-level guidelines and rules that would assist their decision-making when planning work shifts and care times.

Practical implications. Service organizations need to design a 24/7 strategy that includes organizational communication and guidelines on fair work scheduling. Key issues in management are finding ways to enhance predictability within unpredictability, discussing

the most common ethical problems and developing the skills needed to manage diversity. These are elements that should be included in management training.

Originality. The study contributes to the literature by focusing on seldom studied issue and innovately approached by comparing two work sectors: hospitality and retail and flexibly scheduled ECEC services.

Introduction

Management in 24/7 workplaces in the service sector

The demands made by the 24/7 global economy are growing across nations and work forces (Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre 2013, 5). This puts pressure on work-family policies to deal with the possible challenges that arise in relation to childcare, work schedules, intensity of work, and overall job and family strain. Several studies have found that, in particular, lack of control over working hours, often linked with nonstandard working time has several negative consequences for employees, including adverse health effects (Väänänen et al., 2008), increased burnout (Tucker, Bejerot, Kecklund, Aronsson, & Åkerstedt, 2015), work – family conflict (Fagan, Lyonette, Smith, & Saldaña-Tejeda, 2012; Tammelin, Malinen, Rönkä, & Verhoef, 2017), and challenges in arranging childcare (Verhoef, Tammelin, May, Rönkä, & Roeters, 2016). Enjoying high control over working hours seems to buffer negative outcomes, although it is not able to erase all the potential negative effects (Tucker et al., 2015, 110).

The focus of this study on the 24/7 economy is on managers, who are important in implementing work-life policies in the workplace (Kossek & Friede, 2006). They may facilitate or constrain employees' possibilities to exercise control over their working hours (Henly, Shaefer, & Waxman, 2006) or make personalized arrangements (Hornung, Rousseau, & Glaser, 2009; Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). Supervisors often serve as gatekeepers, deciding

whether or not employees have access to flexibilities. They are usually responsible for planning working times. These are crucial for employees seeking to reconcile nonstandard working time and family time. We focus on two different but interlinked 24/7 service sector work contexts. Apart from work taking place around the clock, management of flexibly scheduled ECEC is further complicated by the nonstandard work and care schedules of clients (parents, children).

Further, these two work contexts demonstrate the internalized logic of services in their use of labor, which in turn spills over to the daily lives of the workers. Face-to-face services cannot be banked and collected later; services need to be produced when needed. This causes pressures to ensure that staffing levels meet customer demand; this often means a very short shift rotation, work on call, and cancellations of shifts at short notice. Managers in these sectors may face multiple expectations from employees, superiors, clients and stakeholders, thereby increasing the possibility of various challenges and ethical problems (Hiekkataipale & Lämsä, 2015). This study sought to explore the challenges presented by these 24/7 work sectors and their implications for management practices. First, we introduce the two service sectors studied: hospitality and retail, and flexibly scheduled ECEC.

Hospitality and retail industries: coping with constant change

The hospitality and retail industries were chosen for this study owing to their extensive use of nonstandard work scheduling (Cleveland et al., 2007; Henly & Lambert, 2014; Presser, 2003), especially weekend work (Richbell, Brookes, Brewster, & Woods, 2011; Negrey, 2012). In addition, unpredictable working times are common in these industries where staffing is adjusted according to fluctuations in consumer demand (Cleveland et al., 2007). Start and end times may vary, and there can also be unplanned overtime and reduction in working hours. According to Henly et al. (2006), the need for

adjustments arises partly from seasonal variation in product demand, and partly from business strategies that closely link labor budgets and customer flow projections at monthly, weekly and even hourly levels. Furthermore, owing to low educational barriers to entry, the hospitality and retail industries employ low-educated, low-wage staff (Casper & Swanberg, 2011). Employees thus often welcome additional hours due to their unfavorable economic circumstances. Typically, employee possibilities to exercise control over their work schedules are rather limited. In their interview study with a retail company, Henly et al. (2006) found that although it was company policy to allow employees some control over working hours, this only applied to better salaried, higher ranking and permanent staff. These limited possibilities included, for example, expressing preferences for specific shifts, hours or days and having access to certain formal or informal employee benefits.

For managers, the retail sector presents several challenges due, for example, to the changing nature of the work environment (such as fluctuating customer needs) and technological development (e.g. electronic shopping). Broadbridge (2002) examined factors causing retail managers experiences of stress and their strategies for coping with this. She collected data via a series of group discussions. The main sources of stress reported were factors intrinsic to the job and certain roles in the organization. Causes of stress mentioned were speed and pace of change in the industry, an aggressive management culture, new technological developments, time pressures and constant deadlines, staff shortages and the sheer volume of work, all of which also result in long and often unsocial working hours.

Deery and Jago (2009) reviewed the research literature on work-life balance among employees in the hospitality and tourism industries. The researchers concluded that among the key factors impairing the work-life balance of employees were irregular and long working hours, being rushed and financial hardship. Strategies that impacted positively on work-family balance included flexible scheduling, job sharing and a clear leadership style.

According to Henly et al. (2006), supervisors commonly control the levels of flexibility they allow. Supervisors may, for example, show leniency in applying formal policies and develop rules and practices facilitating flexibility. Employees have also identified several situations where supervisors tend to be especially flexible over scheduling. These included understanding of employee parenting responsibilities and willingness to tailor work schedules to accommodate employees' family and childcare obligations.

Offering flexibility in work schedules is complicated and may involve ethical challenges, as flexibility inevitably raises concerns over fairness. When one person has been accorded flexibility, another "has to pick up the slack" (Trebalt, 2013). In other words, it is possible that coworkers and non-users of flexibility suffer from potential negative equity and fairness effects (Kossek, Thompson, & Lautsch, 2015). Views on fair access to flexibility differ: some believe equality of access, and others that access should be based on merit or need (Young, 1999). Perceptions of fairness are subjective: different employees may experience similar work schedules differently.

Cho and Dansereau (2010) distinguish between individual- and group-level perceptions of justice in organizations; both types are important for successful leadership. At the individual level, leaders should focus on interpersonal relations, support and flexibility by taking personal situations into account. At the group level, the aim is to create a procedural justice climate by strengthening vision, collective identity, solidarity and harmony in a team and by treating the co-members of teams consistently and equally. applying high ethical and moral standards. Further, drawing on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), positive perceptions of justice at both levels create individual feelings of reciprocity, which means increased readiness to engage in extra effort beyond the call of duty, and willingness to sacrifice personal benefits for collective goals. These two approaches to fairness may,

however, demand balancing acts from managers between individual- and group-level perceptions of justice.

Flexibly scheduled ECEC services: Accommodating varying and unpredictable parental schedules

Centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC services are workplaces where the 24/7 economy is visible daily in double, or even triple, ways. Not only do the personnel work nonstandard hours, but so also do the clients, i.e. parents, whose children then attend childcare at nonstandard hours. Further, the ultimate aim and societal task of these services is to secure the optimal wellbeing of children and meet their needs as well as those of their parents.

Finland is one of the few countries in the world that offers universal center-based ECEC for families where both parents or a sole parent work nonstandard hours. This service is mainly municipally provided. About 7 percent of all Finnish children using formal childcare services attend flexibly scheduled ECEC. Mostly, this concerns early education and care in the early morning and late evening, but also overnight and weekend care. Nowadays, many other countries offer childcare at extended hours but around-the-clock services are less common (Halfon & Friendly, 2015; Statham & Mooney, 2003). Service provision in flexibly scheduled ECEC differs from daytime ECEC in one crucial respect: whereas in daytime ECEC all the children usually enter and leave the center at approximately the same time, in flexibly scheduled ECEC centers children have very individual care times depending on their parents' working patterns. This presents many challenges for, among others, pedagogical planning and harmonizing the schedules of personnel and children.

Flexibly scheduled ECEC services—like all municipal childcare services in Finland—are generally of high quality and well-functioning (Taguma, Litjens, & Makowiecki, 2012), but

concerns about children's wellbeing remain. No guidelines at the central government level exist specifically for flexibly scheduled ECEC, although the service was introduced several decades ago. The current practices conform, as far possible, to the general legislation on early childhood education and care (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973; National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education, 2016; National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016). Consequently, municipalities have developed a variety of local guidelines and practices for flexibly scheduled ECEC services. Moreover, center directors are highly responsible for adapting these general regulations, guidelines and practices to the local context.

The few reports published on day care during nonstandard hours (e.g., Halfon & Friendly, 2015; Rutter & Evans, 2012; Statham & Mooney, 2003) have identified several management-related challenges. These include difficulties in accommodating the varying and unpredictable schedules of parents, high costs of staying open late, and difficulties in hiring and retaining staff.

As the above-mentioned examples show, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and its management are affected by the rapid and constant changes in present-day working life. The concept of contextual leadership captures the unique features of the leadership of flexibly scheduled ECEC-services. According to Nivala (1999) and Hujala (2004, 2013), ECEC leadership can be seen as a contextual system comprising relationships with children, parents, educators, local and state authorities and, finally, the whole society and its culture. Nowadays, the term leadership is increasingly used to refer to the work of the directors of childcare centers, who have several, somewhat overlapping, leadership functions, such as human resource management, pedagogical leadership, and daily management (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013). Managing work schedules to fit children's schedules is estimated to be

more time-consuming in flexibly scheduled ECEC than in ECE-services operating daytime (e.g. Halfon & Friendly, 2015), which obviously reduces the time for other leadership duties.

Finland as a context for work and management in the 24h economy

Countries vary widely in their work-family policies and their implementation. In the Nordic countries, the government both supports and regulates employers more in the area of work-family policies than, for example, in the US (Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2013, 6). Support for employed parents is also extensive, including universal financially supported child-care services, parental leaves and benefits. Finland is one of the so-called Nordic welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Nevertheless, as elsewhere, employees differ in their possibilities for work-family reconciliation according to both their occupational status and work organization (Salmi & Lammi-Taskula, 2011).

Finland has long had a coordinated production system (Gallie & Russell, 2009), meaning, for example, that working hours and service opening hours have traditionally been regulated. Evening and night work has been higher paid and rest periods between work shifts carefully regulated. Recently, however, there has been a trend towards diversifying the workforce; for example, the number of zero-hour contracts has increased (Pärnänen, 2015). Another important development has been a new law (1618/2015) on shop opening hours (effective from 1 January 2016). Its effects are already visible in lengthened service hours.

Overall, this means that service production in the retail sector is now less regulated. The new law is expected to increase overall employment in retail and, further, impact on the demand for day and night care services. Moreover, although working nonstandard hours presents challenges for childcare arrangements and child well-being, most European countries, including Finland, do not have national regulations controlling the working times of parents with young children (Eurostat, 2013). These recent developments make

organizational-level studies even more important than hitherto, as they mean that national policies have a weaker role and organizations more room to act in accordance with their preferences. Further, Finland has no national regulations limiting children's total hours in care or stipulating the latest hour a child can be picked up from care.

Aims of the study

This study focused on management practices relating to work and care time scheduling in work sectors operating 24/7. The study contributes to the literature by focusing on seldom studied issue and innovately approached by comparing two work sectors: hospitality and retail and flexibly scheduled ECEC services. We focus on middle managers who typically face pressures from many directions, including responsibility for the wellbeing of both their staff and clients (Hiekkataipale & Lämsä, 2015). We sought answers to the following research questions. What are the main challenges facing managers in 24/7 workplaces, especially those relating to working time and care service scheduling? What acts of fairness are implemented in work scheduling? What specific characteristics regarding the key challenges can be identified in each sector?

Methods and materials

Two datasets from two separate but interlinked research projects were utilized to explore the typical aspects of management in work places operating 24/7. These datasets were expected to contribute to a multifaceted picture of management.

Study 1. Focus group interviews with managers in the hospitality and retail industries. The first dataset is based on a research and development project titled "Take

Care 24/7”, which approaches work performed at non-standard hours from the perspective of employees, managers and workplaces. Participants were recruited from a large, national retail cooperative and its three regional cooperatives located in different parts of Finland. The participants in this study worked in supervisory positions in hotels, stores and service stations with restaurants and shopping facilities. Data from managers were collected via focus group interviews (N=5) in which 20 managers participated. Two to five managers participated in each focus group interview. The thematic areas of the interviews included human resource management in a 24h economy, fairness of management and health management. This study focused on the issue of fairness. The questions concerned, for example, how managers understood fairness and what challenges they faced and good practices they utilized when aiming at fairness, for example, in work scheduling. The focus group interviews lasted from 90 to 150 minutes.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). Themes were identified by applying an inductive approach, and are thus strongly linked to the data (Patton 1990). In the first phase, we familiarized ourselves with the data, listed all the aspects that seemed relevant to our research questions, generated initial codes, and identified broader themes. The next phase included reconsidering and revising the themes to include all those relevant themes while eliminating those irrelevant to this particular study. Finally, we defined and named the themes.

Study 2. Web survey data of directors working in centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC. The second dataset was drawn from a large international consortium study “Children’s socioemotional wellbeing and daily family life in a 24h economy” (Families 24/7 study), where nonstandard working time was studied from the viewpoint of parents, children and early educators (Rönkä et al., 2017). In this study, we used data collected via a web survey from centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC. These centers (34 units) were

selected from 25 municipalities in geographically different parts of Finland. The municipalities were purposefully sampled to cover both big (over 60 000 inhabitants) and small (less than 60 000 inhabitants) municipalities equally. The web survey was completed by early educators (N=227) working in these selected centers. The web survey included both structured and open-ended questions on, for example, care times, pedagogy and cooperation with parents. In this article, we analyze the answers provided by the twenty directors of the day and night care centers participating in the survey. The questions addressed specifically to the center directors included the following open-ended question, which is our focus of interest in this report: “What aspects of leadership do you experience as the most challenging in flexibly scheduled ECEC?” A thematic content analysis was performed on the open-ended answers

All participating centers offered childcare from the early morning to late evening, and some also overnight and during weekends. In most cases, the childcare center clientele numbered 76-100 children. Not every childcare center had its own director; in many cases a director administered two or even more childcare centers, only one of which operated during nonstandard hours.

Results

Management in the hospitality and retail industry: balancing between business goals and diverse employee needs

The Study 1 participants worked in grocery stores, fuel and service stations, and restaurants and hotels. Retail work is characterized by rush-hour and seasonal trade, with continuous unpredictability in customer numbers, as exemplified in the following citations:

“It’s all in flux. You can suddenly get a call on Monday that on Thursday there’ll be 120 people coming to the restaurant, so you have to know where to get four more staff for that shift”

“We never know beforehand that suddenly three buses full of people will be arriving at the parking place, and this is something you don’t know when you do the rosters”

Managers are responsible for work scheduling in their unit. We asked the participants in the focus groups interviews to describe their work scheduling duties. We were especially interested in how they understood fairness in work scheduling and the challenges this involves in in hospitality and retail workplaces operating 24/7. Five thematic categories (a-e) were identified from the focus group interviews (see Table 1).

a) The main finding was that the managers aimed at being fair in work scheduling, which above all meant treating their subordinates equally; that is, a situation where all employees have similar rights and duties.

“I think it means that you treat all employees equally, no favoritism. Whether its work scheduling or following rules or whatever, you have to be equal and fair.” This conception of fairness is linked to the so-called traditional view of fairness of management.

(b). In practice fair and equal treatment was perceived as difficult because interpretations of fairness, e.g., between the manager and individual employees may differ.

“Although you try to be fair in work scheduling and in how you do things in your position, there is always somebody saying that you’re not”

“It is difficult because what is important to one person is not important to another: the concept of fairness with rosters looks different to each individual “

In a 24/7 workplace, the manager's role in facilitating reconciliation between work and leisure time is crucial for employees, which explains the difficulties managers have in fulfilling the various needs of employees.

“ I think it it's the work scheduling that is most visible thing or at least a large part of this work; and this is where people see themselves as only getting silly shifts and what have they done wrong for not getting what they wanted”

Table 1 about here

(c) In the hospitality and retail industry, employees are commonly diverse in age, life stage, family form and family phase. They include both young adults and elderly people, students, permanent and temporary staff, employees with or without children and single parents. Hence, how to treat employees with varying needs equally presented a major challenge: family situations and forms vary and manifest different problems, making it impossible to objectively rank who is entitled to more individual flexibility than others. As one manager noted, treating employees equally would be easy if they were all the same age, in the same family phase and at the same stage of life.

“It would be an easy task if all workers were 23 years old, single, studying. It would be a piece of cake to divide up the work and use a regular system for work scheduling. But in the face of all the singles, widows, lone fathers, etc., how can fairness be achieved?”

The challenge in making rosters culminates in how you far you're able to take all employees' wishes into account. People are different, their life situations are different but you anyway have to keep it all going”

Managers have to balance between their business goals and employee needs. One manager described this tension in this way: *“... underlying all this is the question of efficiency so it's not enough to devise attractive work shifts.”*

To be fair in work scheduling, the managers had different coping strategies: some really tried hard to treat everyone the same; others prioritized certain groups of employees based on specific criteria, for example single mothers and families with young children. One manager explained that she gives employees with children priority on public holidays: *“For example Christmas. Its families with young children that have priority. I think it is totally fair”*. A third strategy was to understand this diversity and take advantage of it, meaning that the manager seeks to balance varying employee needs, and arrive at an optimal solution. One manager had noticed that a work community with heterogeneous needs could actually function well: *“Singles usually want to be free at New Year and family men at Christmas”*.

(d) Openness and interacting with the employees were pointed out by the managers as ways of enhancing fairness. They underlined the importance of knowing their staff and being there for them. They reported regularly discussing employees' wishes and expectations with them planning shifts.

“I think that open discussion and asking who wants to work at what time is helpful and makes for example shift planning easier during Christmas time”

(e) Some explained that clear rules and solidarity between employees were paramount in implementing fair work scheduling, especially when the manager wanted to avoid the effects of inequality (comp. Kossek et al., 2015). One respondent pointed out that he/she wanted the reasons for work scheduling to be made explicit:

“If you can't be fair to everyone you should be able to justify why somebody, for example, has more evening shifts on this week's roster than others...so we can reverse the situation in next week's rosters.”

In the absence of formal rules, the managers had to compromise and deal with the tension arising from perceptions of their management practices as unfair by some employees and fair

by others. Sometimes they felt frustrated by employees' misinterpretations of the roster, as one manager explained:

" For example work scheduling...they [employees] can read the lists like 'All I ever get are silly work shifts. So what crimes have I committed because I haven't got any public holidays off again"

In sum (see Table 1), a fair work schedule in the retail sector involves many tensions: between diverse employees with differing personal needs and preferences, between business goals and employee needs, and tensions arising out of a lack of rules on the organizational level. In the absence of rules and guidelines, the managers based their management practices on a strategy that suited their individual management style, preferences and values. The most important actions making for fairness in scheduling included transparency in decision-making and agreement about the central values behind the decisions made.

Managing flexibly scheduled ECEC services: balancing between multiple needs

Centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC, the context for Study 2, differ from organizations in the retail sector, as in ECEC the adult-child ratio and service quality are regulated by law, and the services operate first of all in the interest of children's health and wellbeing. Yet the families who need this kind of childcare service do not live in stable circumstances: parents often have to work when required by their employers or they experience fluctuation in their work schedules at short notice. The work at centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC is characterized by constant change. The number of children in care varies from day to day and from hour to hour with low predictability.

Although families are asked to inform centers about their children's care schedules in advance - usually a week beforehand - their childcare needs tend to change frequently, and often at short notice, even during the day in question. Centers try to serve families in all cases, although they are not obliged to arrange childcare at short notice if this causes changes

in staff schedules. Families, however, can cancel reservations very late without sanctions. The staff, nevertheless, must be ready to work with different groups of children and on varying shifts according to changes in family needs. The director, to maximize the efficient use of resources, may change the group an educator has been scheduled to work with or even cancel the entire shift at short notice. Some centers have recruited permanent staff who are willing to work nonstandard hours, thereby decreasing the pressure on the other staff to work at inconvenient times. This situation, where fewer educators work shifts, also has the advantage of increasing children's experiences of continuity and stability.

In the web survey, we asked the directors to describe the main challenges they face in their work in centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC. Seven thematic categories (a-g) were identified from the directors' open-ended answers to this question (Table 1)

(a) The directors reported parental working times and unpredictable changes in parents' work schedules as their biggest problem. Unpredictability in working hours and service demand caused them constant problems in arranging services to meet parents' needs and providing enough personnel. It was sometimes hard to get the necessary information from parents as a routine procedure.

“Constant changes and cancellations in children's care times, [hence] the employees have gaps in their working hours. One has to repeatedly ask parents to report the timing of their holidays and days off etc.”

“Nowadays working life is hectic and needs in workplaces vary. That's why I have to negotiate over and change work shifts, departing from what was planned. Many parents work on short contracts, and at very short notice”

(b,c) In planning care times and work shifts for personnel, the directors had to take into account both the general, but inadequate, national legislation on ECEC and the guidelines and resources dispensed by the service provider. The directors felt that the heads of childcare services do not understand the reality faced by centers offering flexibly scheduled ECEC, and that this service is neglected at the national level. This causes them

extra problems. Directors are expected to apply the same rules and adult-child ratios in flexibly scheduled ECEC as in regular ECEC; this is difficult, owing, for example, to constant change in staffing needs and the unique needs of children during the so-called sensitive hours, i.e., evenings and nights. The provision of flexibly scheduled care for only a few children, let alone a single child, takes up the working time of a one adult, which may an already cost-effective allocation of staffing resources.

“Allocating the right amount of staff - - how to make the heads understand how hard this work is. Statistically, we have enough staff.”

“The upper level [administration] and decision makers are unable to see the difference between day and night care and regular day care.”

(d) The directors were worried about the wellbeing of staff who work nonstandard hours and have unpredictable work schedules. Changes and cancellations in employees' shifts due to changes in parental working times were common. Directors were aware of the frustration this caused and pondered how to motivate their staff.

“How can I keep my staff motivated when the daily schedule fails again, despite very good planning?”

“The flexibility of our employees is being tested by repeated changes in shifts”

(e) Further, communication among the personnel and between the personnel and the director is difficult because the directors only work regular office hours Monday to Friday, while most of the others work non-regular hours.

(f) This hampers the building of uniform pedagogical thinking and practices among the staff, and thereby also impedes pedagogical leadership by the director. Similarly, due to changing work and care schedules and the occasional addition of children with late evening and night care needs from other centers, it is challenging for the director and the educators to

gain a holistic picture of all the children in their care and communicate with their parents.

Directors reported difficulty getting information on each child and meeting with the staff:

“It is difficult to get information about each child. How and when can I meet every member of the staff when I work office hours. Can I trust that everything is okay during the evenings and weekends?”

“I meet my staff only seldom because I work daytime, they work in shifts”

(g) The directors were also concerned about the children. They found it challenging to incorporate the perspective and well-being of children in decision-making. For example, some children may spend very long periods in care at one time. Moreover, many children with nonstandard and irregular care times have more human relationships to build and cope with than children in regular day care groups. The directors often also needed to clarify what is important for a child’s wellbeing, and together with the parents work out the best arrangements for the child’s care. For the directors, the child’s point of view was important but unclear, as the national legislation and guidelines, although prioritizing the interest of the child, do not indicate what this means in practice.

“- - the groups are big and we are open 24/7; how can we better bring into focus the importance of the children’s wellbeing.”

“How can I guarantee what is best for the child with these limited resources?”

The directors, however, wished for more specific national guidelines to support the fairness and ethical basis of their decision making, especially from the children’s standpoint. At the same time, they try to ensure perceptions of justice on the individual level by serving families according to their quickly changing needs for childcare. This in turn means that employees are asked to be flexible and put the organization before their personal needs. It remains unclear what they get in exchange; it is little wonder that directors are worried about how to motivate their staff in this situation (for staff perceptions of justice, see Cho and Danserau (2010).

Discussion and conclusions

Nonstandard working hours and the so-called 24/7 society has become increasingly the rule in some sectors. The results of this study, summarized in Table 1, show that 24/7 service availability in retail and in ECEC services raises several issues of fairness and social responsibility.

In both contexts, work shift planning and resource allocation are complicated in services where customer flows and needs vary and are unpredictable. Managers have to cope with constant change while also supporting their employees. Besides business goals, managers have to take employees' needs into account and in ECEC services the wellbeing of parents and children. In both contexts, managers complained about the lack of formal, organizational-level guidelines and rules that would assist them in considering employees' different needs when planning shifts and care times. Hence, they had created practices of their own to be able to tackle the challenges of managing a diverse workforce fairly. Whereas in hospitality and retail the tension is between the cost-effectiveness of services and employee wellbeing and work-family reconciliation, the ECEC center director has to take into account the viewpoints of not only the service provider and employees, but also parents and children, which further raises ethical issues. Moreover, the 24/7 economy seems to affect both work processes and work quality as employees, 'clients' and directors are not regularly present at the same time and in the same place.

Fair work shift planning at the heart of management practices in 24/7 workplaces

The managers in hospitality and retail had especially to evaluate the fairness of their actions, choices and decisions in their daily work. In coordinating and scheduling employees' working times, managers tried to treat everyone equally and fairly. However, due to

unpredictability and variation in service demand and employees' diverse needs this was not simple. In scheduling working times the manager had to do compromises that were perceived as unfair by some employees and fair by others. Furthermore, managers were responsible for their actions to their supervisors or service provider, which could sometimes cause ethical problems (see Hiekkataipale & Lämsä, 2015). In support of Henly et al. (2006), managers varied in the extent to which they were able and willing to take employee viewpoints into account.

In both contexts, managers have also to be sensitive to the diversity of family forms and life phases of their employees. Kossek and Friede (2006) suggest that managers should keep in mind the work-life needs of all the demographic groups represented, including those who do not have traditional work-family issues, such as the needs of individuals without children and older employees nearing retirement age.

Whereas in hospitality and retail the tension was between the cost-effectiveness of services and employee wellbeing, the directors of ECEC services had to consider not only the viewpoints of the service provider and employees, but also those of parents and children. Successful management in 24/ workplaces thus requires understanding of multiple perspectives and, as Kossek et al. (2015) note, a balanced flexibility approach that is, striking a balance between the interests of all the stakeholders: employees, supervisors, coworkers and customers. To practice balanced flexibility successfully, the involvement of whole work teams is important. It is crucial that a manager treats all members of the same group consistently and equally; applying high ethical and moral standards (see Cho and Dansereau, 2010).

Multiplying unpredictability in a 24/7society

This study, combining two datasets, demonstrates how an increase of service availability during nonstandard hours amplifies the need for other services. Flexibly

scheduled ECEC services can be understood as ‘second order’ services in the 24/7 economy, as they respond to the needs caused by nonstandard work schedules in other sectors. Parents working in the hospitality and retail industry with unpredictable hours need flexibly scheduled ECEC services. This means that ECEC services are unable to plan their work rosters well in advance. Consequently, the needs of the work organization spill over not only to the organization’s employees, but also to the services they use, such as childcare services. Similarly, Jordan (2008) found that directors’ scheduling experiences were influenced by parents’ changing work schedules, necessitating changes in their children’s enrollment patterns. In turn, directors had to alter caregivers’ schedules, which was frustrating for all parties.

Today’s just-in-time production system thus has far-reaching consequences, and flexibly scheduled ECEC services would appear to be at the heart of this two-tiered system; they have a vital role in meeting the needs of working parents and their children, while simultaneously trying to secure their own workers’ right to predictability in their working hours. In flexibly scheduled ECEC services, the director decides how far care schedules can be adapted to last-minute changes in parents’ work schedules (see Halfon & Friendly, 2015).

The study demonstrates how changes in working life spill over to the daycare context and hence to leadership. It is, therefore, essential to see leadership within the wider context of working life, social policy and cultural expectations and values (Hujala, 2004; 2013; Nivala 1999). Regulations and resources on the state and local levels as well as the local organizational culture and resources of the childcare center are intermingled in the implementation of leadership. While the director is in dialogue with the organizational structures and culture of the center and the wider organization of ECE, leadership quality is also measured by taking the views of the other stakeholders and societal levels into account.

Limitations and practical implications

This study has its limitations. First, the relatively small sample sizes restrict the generalizability of the results. As the data were collected as part of large multimethod research projects, we were, however, able to contextualize the findings with relevant organizational level and background information. Second, the data were not representative, and we were not able to control for or evaluate possible differences between participants and nonparticipants. Third, the two samples were collected using different methods: focus group interviews and an open survey question. These different methods may have exerted their own instrument-related effect and biased the result in some way.

In conclusion, the study shows that managers have an important role in the lives of people working nonstandard hours. Alongside work itself, exchange of scheduling information within organizations is a topic that needs continuous attention. How managers understand the diverse needs of customers and how openly they communicate with employees, affects many people. Service organizations need to design a 24/7 strategy that includes organizational communication and guidelines on fair work scheduling. One possible solution for managers is to involve parents and employers in dialogue to find new ways to solve the tensions relating to work and care schedules. According to Hujala (2003) collaboration with the staff is essential in clarifying the organization's mission and constructing the strategy to attain it.

Key issues in management are finding ways to enhance predictability within unpredictability, discussing the most common ethical problems and developing the skills needed to manage diversity. These are elements that should be included in management training.

Compliance with Ethical Standards:

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Ethical approval: This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Table 1. Comparison of two work contexts

24/ 7 services: Key challenges of management practices	
Issues shared: - Services operating day-and-night - Planning of work shifts important - Customer demand defines work shifts (just-in-time services) - Optimal matching of resources (lack of resources) - Coping with constant change - Lack of formal, organizational level guidelines	
Context 1: Hospitality and retail industries	Context 2: Flexibly scheduled ECEC-services
Key challenge relates to the planning of work shifts	Key challenge relates to the planning of work shifts and quality of care & wellbeing of children and personnel
<i>Issues important to this service field:</i>	<i>Issues important to this service field:</i>
a) Fair management (treating employees impartially and equally) is in the heart of managerial practices	a) Unpredictable changes in customer demand, i.e. parental working times (causing difficulties in scheduling work)
b) Experience of fairness is individual	b) Child care services regulated by law (i.e. adult-child ratio); but lack of legislation on day-and-night care
c) Diversity of workforce makes fairness difficult	c) Concern about the wellbeing of personnel
d) Fairness is co-created in interaction	d) The service provider's interest in cost-effective resource use
e) Fairness is transparency of decision making.	e) Challenges of communication in 24/7 work
	f) Pedagogical issues
	g) The child's perspective