I. Introduction

The emphasis on promoting work-life balance (hereafter WLB) in Europe and Japan has tended to focus on instrumental motivations for WLB, low fertility (Takahashi et al. 2014a), and being competitive in global economies through activation of women’s labor force (Lewis 2009; Dean et al. 2005). At the same time, there are other discourses that have emerged in policy and research debates on the importance of WLB policies at the state and at the European level that are framed in terms of the best interests of the child and gender equality in which men’s access to WLB policies in care has become salient (Devon and Moss 2002). More recently the discourse on WLB has been cast in terms of quality of life, wellbeing and health and the sustainability of future generations (Kossek et al. 2014; Lewis et al. 2007). This has been the main thrust in my research on capabilities and WLB (Hobson 2014a).

Among researchers and policymakers, there is a growing awareness of the importance of involving fathers in WLB (Hobson 2014a; Lewis 2009). In European countries and in Japan, a range of policies exist to foster greater WLB for both mothers and fathers, including gender-neutral parental leaves, rights for flexible working times and reduced hours of work after a child is born. Yet there are barriers that stand in the way of men exercising these rights (what we refer to as the Agency and Capabilities Gap (Hobson 2014a). European data show that the overwhelming majority of men when choosing employment think about whether the job allows them to combine work and family life...
Japanese research also has revealed men’s rising aspirations for spending more time with the family (Takahashi et al. 2014b). In this paper I argue that it is important to view men’s agency for WLB, or lack of it, looking through a multi-dimensional lens that focuses on the welfare state/policy, firm and cultural levels within different societal normative contexts. I engage with both the opportunities and the constraints in men’s WLB in Sweden, a country that is profiled as one of the most gender equal societies (Gornick and Meyers 2009), and which scores highest in the Ray et al. (2010) index of father friendly policies. Whereas much of the debate on Swedish policy on gender equality has tended to be either celebratory, the glass half full (what Sweden has achieved), or the glass half empty (the lack of change), particularly in terms of men’s contribution to care and unpaid work, my research on capabilities has concentrated on the possibilities for making change and the obstacles that stand in the way. The Swedish case allows us to consider the resiliency of gendered norms in the family and workplace and the potential for norm change: To what extent do the existence of specific policies facilitate change and, more generally, how are entitlements converted into agency for WLB?

The paper is divided into four sections: First, I present the theoretical framework and multi-level model of capabilities for WLB (Section II). Then, I focus on three main policies for WLB in the Swedish context of men’s capabilities and agency for making claims for them: flexibility in work hours, rights to reduce hours and parental leave (Section III). In this section I devote more space to father leave (daddy quota) and trace the seeds of this policy back to the 1970s. In section IV, I turn to the firm level, looking beneath the state, and beyond the state, to global processes and institutions impeding change (Section V). The final section (VI) engages with the glass half empty and glass half full within the context of what some have called the unfinished gender revolution (England 2014; Gerson 2010; Goldscheider et al. 2015). I conclude with the lessons to be learned from the Swedish case for WLB in Japan (Section VII).

II. Theoretical Framework and Models of Fathers and WLB

Since I published Making Men into Fathers in 2002, there has been a flowering of research on fathers and welfare regimes and an acknowledgment of the need for building in other sets of relations involving employment policies, working time regimes and work organizational culture (Lewis et al. 2007; den Dulk et al. 2014). Looking beyond the state, there is growing awareness of the importance of global and transnational institutions and actors and their impact on WLB (O’Brien 2013). Despite this burgeoning of research on WLB across many dimensions, there remains a lack of integration in these research domains—research on the state policy regime level, research on the firm and work organization and a large body of research on the household level. Also lacking is a theoretical framework that provides the analytical leverage for integrating these different domains. In our study of the agency and capabilities gap, we found that Sen’s (1992) capability approach had the potential for developing a model for WLB that enabled us to integrate these different levels of analysis: the multi-dimensional lens allowed us to capture the diversities across and within societies. Finally the dynamic agency-centered perspective in Sen’s (1992) capability approach provided theoretical space to engage with the agency gap between policies, norms and practices in WLB: whether fathers can make claims for WLB and whether these are granted.

Below is the multi-dimensional model of factors shaping the possibilities for WLB. As is obvious the different levels, individual, institutional and societal, are nested in one another, reflecting complex and in-
teracting processes shaping agency for WLB. Also linked to agency and agency inequalities in WLB are two interlocking mechanisms: the perceived scope of alternatives and the risks and penalties for prioritizing WLB, which can lead to a wage penalty, being passed over by promotion, and even job loss. However one’s scope of alternatives can also encompass the possibilities of leaving one’s job and finding a more family friendly job environment. The sense of entitlement to claim WLB policies is nested in layers of context, as illustrated in the model: the household, state policy context, workplace organization and the gendered norms operating at the workplace. In this paper, I do not focus on the sense of entitlement to make claims at the household level, on which there is an extensive literature based on bargaining and exchange models (Nash 1950), and household specialization (Becker 1991). Rather I concentrate on the institutional/normative context shaping father’s agency freedoms to make claims for WLB. To what extent is there an agency gap in WLB in Sweden: what are the sources; which fathers have the weakest agency for WLB and in which situations?

III. WLB Policies

1. Parental leave

Three core policies have been widely debated in the research on fathers and WLB over the last decades: flexibility in work hours and workplace, the right to reduce hours, and parental leave. Focusing on the Swedish case; I begin with parental leave, in which Sweden has been a pioneer and researchers have argued that it is a policy that has the potential to alter gender equality in the family and workplace (Gornick and Meyers 2009). The point of departure in men’s use of parental leave rights has been whether the policy is gender neutral (now part of European law) and whether it is a social right, the replacement level of wages compensated...
(since men are normally the main breadwinner in the family). The surge in father’s use of parental leave has occurred in countries with specific targeted months for fathers (Ray et al. 2010), known as the daddy quota or the daddy months. In Sweden, when the policy was enacted, the family lost a month of the leave if men did not use the non-transferable leave (use it or lose it).

All Nordic countries adopted a daddy quota, though there are differences in the length of the leave, or whether mothers and fathers can take the leave simultaneously (see Table 1). The existence of a daddy quota matters as the Danish case demonstrates. There was a daddy month, but it was abolished in 2002 after four years; now it is available through some collective agreements. Hence it is not surprising that the Danish fathers’ share of the leave is lowest, 7 percent. Although in both Norway and Sweden between 80 and 90 percent take some leave (Norway has allocated more weeks for the father quota), in Sweden fathers take a much larger share of the leave (25 percent) and are more likely to be fathers at home on their own, non-simultaneously leave. Icelandic men have the highest share, with a three month daddy quota, though the parental leave period is shorter (nine months) and fathers take fewer days than fathers in Sweden. Quite recently, Sweden extended the reserved time for fathers to 3 months so men’s share may rise in the next years. The highly flexible policy facilitates more uptake, since fathers can use the leave in days, half days, and even one-eighth of day.

From the perspective of Sen’s capability approach, the existence of an entitlement itself does not necessarily lead to sense of entitlement to claim it. Not just the design of the policy has to be considered, but whether and how it becomes part of the normative and ideological landscape in societies—whether there is fertile soil for reforms to root (Hobson et al. 2014). Since the 1970s, the participation of men and women in the spheres of family and employment has been part of the ideological core of the Swedish model of gender equality. The individual tax policy sought to undermine the single breadwinner norm and the extensive childcare policy propelled women’s massive entry into the labor force. The gender neutral parental leave policy, the first of its kind in 1978, aimed at decentering the idea of naturalized motherhood. In the early debates, the seed had been already planted for reserving months for the father; both the Liberal and Social Democratic parties argued for at least one out of the eight be reserved for the father (Bergman and Hobson 2002). It took over two decades before the daddy months came on the agenda again. Before the daddy leave policy was put into effect, only 30 percent took any leave at all, and men’s overall share hovered around five or six percent (Hobson et al. 2014).

Initiated in 1993, the policy mandated one month that had to be reserved for the partner who had not taken any leave (the father), which was later expanded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Iceland</th>
<th>Norway</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total weeks</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47–57</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50–64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only mother</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only father quota</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareable leave</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s proportion</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Note: Sweden has recently passed a law extending the daddy months to three months taking effect in 2016.
to two months. The daddy month was accompanied by a massive government campaign in which every employer was sent a packet from the National Insurance Board. Widely publicized was the report of a government committee composed of fathers (Pappagruppen) who were asked to investigate the obstacles preventing fathers from taking up their rights for parental leave. The report of the committee highlighted structural constraints at the workplace, family dynamics (mothers’ unwillingness to share the leave) and age-old patterns that prejudice society against men as caregivers. The blameworthy were recalcitrant employers (Bergman and Hobson 2002). The discourse had shifted, as revealed in the two images that dominated the two campaigns: one from the 1970s was of a famous wrestler who was holding an infant meant to appeal to working class men with the message that fatherhood was not incompatible with masculinity. In the 1990s a new image appeared in campaign posters of professional men working in the private sector. In one such poster, a father puts a smile on his employer’s face while he is making a request for parental leave. Here, the message targeted employers in the private sector.

The daddy leave policy provided fathers with strong incentives to take advantage of their rights and increased their capabilities to make claims for these rights at the workplace and negotiate with partners. The public discourse, government campaigns and support of unions gave it more legitimacy (Bergman and Hobson 2002), all of which enhanced men’s sense of entitlement to claim their rights to parental leave.

Fathers’ proportion of the leave differs by class, education, age and partner’s situation (Hobson et al. 2006), and whether a father is a public sector employee. Nonetheless, nine out of ten Swedish fathers are taking advantage of the daddy months (Brandth and Kvande 2016; Hobson et al. 2014) found a strong sense of entitlement for fathers to make claims for parental rights across job sector, education and skill.

There remains, however, a class gradient in parental leave use. Men with very low incomes take short leaves or no leave (Hobson et al. 2006: 285). In these households where there is a weak male breadwinner, mothers have weak capabilities and agency in parental leave; they tend to take much shorter leaves since their earnings are crucial for the family economy. The reverse pattern exists for women with low paying jobs; they tend to take longer parental leave (Hobson et al. 2006: 285).

The most recent research shows that immigrant fathers from countries outside Europe are exceptional since they are the least likely to take any parental leave days (Tervola et al. 2016). Cultural norms could explain these differences, but so might the employment situation of immigrant fathers, who tend to have a much weaker position in the labor market; immigrants in Sweden have a much higher proportion of precarious jobs than do native born (Eurostat 2013). This example suggests the difficulties in disentangling the processes driving choices and capabilities to convert entitlements into a sense of entitlement to claim them.

2. Flexible work

The right to request flexibility in working time and place is not inscribed in EU law, but rather has been put forward as an example of “best practice” to promote WLB (European Commission 2008) in order to enable employed parents to meet family needs. Sweden scores highest among European countries allowing for flexibility in time and place. Only 38 percent reported that they had times set entirely by the employer (Ramioul and Huys 2007) (see Figure 2). However, differences in flexible work options can vary by gender, education, job sector, and work structure; and whether the job is task- or time-dependent (Lewis et al. 2008; Fagan and Walthery 2014). Task dependent jobs, most often held by white collar employees, provides the most opportunities for making claims for flexible work
options and employers have used flexible working time schemes to attract skilled workers (Peper et al. 2014).

Yet, in these kinds of jobs, in which flexibility in working times allow for autonomy and control over the pace of work, there is evidence that flexibility does not necessarily enhance WLB (Hobson 2014a). One reason is the spillover effect of working time into family time: that those with the most autonomy often hold positions of responsibility in work organizations that place high demands on them (Drobnič and Guillén 2011), and they often work some of the longest hours (Van der Lippe and Peters 2007). Using three European data sets, Drobnič and Guillén (2011), found that jobs with control/autonomy are more likely to increase work–home interference rather than alleviate it. In Sweden 46 percent of fathers are working more than 40 hours per week.

A survey from the Swedish National Insurance Board asking working parents what would lead to a better WLB showed that flexibility was not high on the list, but rather reduced working hours (Hobson et al. 2014). Flexibility has been achieved at many workplaces in Sweden, but it does not necessarily result in more time for family and for leisure activities, quality of life indicators in capabilities for WLB (Hobson 2014a).

3. Reduced hours

In 1978, long before the EU directive on part time work, Sweden anticipated the European Union Directive on the right to request reduced hours for working parents with children under seven. Cross-national European data show that men would consider reducing hours but not taking part time jobs, which reflects the gender coded status of these types of jobs (Fagan 2004), often referred to as the “mommy track” in employment. While a significant proportion of mothers in Sweden have taken advantage of the right to work part time in the early years of childrearing (43 percent in 2013) only one in five of men have claimed this right (Haas and Hwang 2016). In this context it is important to distinguish between part-time employment, with some statutory protections, and part-time work with full protections (that does not lead to a downgrading of skills). Fagan and Walthery (2014) refer to this as full reversibility, which allows employees to move from fulltime to part time and back to fulltime. Sweden has some of the strongest protections for parents’ rights to full reversibility (Fagan and Walthery 2014).

Asking why fathers do not exercise their rights for reduced hours, Haas and Hwang (2016) conclude that there has been little support at the firm level. In their study, companies reported that no more than 20 percent reduced hours and no male manager reported that he had ever reduced hours. The shorter working day has been debated in Sweden since 1978. Unions have not chosen to promote a 30-hour work-week. Instead they bargained for longer vacations and succeeded in getting a cap on contracted overtime hours, 2000 hours...
per year (Haas and Hwang 2016). However, this includes only contracted hours not actual hours. Managers of companies have felt little pressure from the government or unions for reducing the work week (Haas and Hwang 2016). Gendered norms in working time regimes are still operating in firms: companies expect that women will be those who claim them and are the main caregivers in families.

IV. The Firm

1. Mediator, gatekeeper or innovator

The firm level is a crucial dimension in WLB, a site where policies are interpreted, where claims are granted or denied. It can be a gatekeeper, but more often it is a mediator, balancing the goals of the firm with the desires of employees (Kanjevo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar, 2014). The firm can also be an innovator, developing innovative policies beyond statutory rights (den Dulk et al. 2014).

In Sweden, larger firms were often more likely to offer incentives for fathers, such as topping-up the parental leave benefit (from 80–85 percent to 100 percent of wage replacement). However even in firms where there is workplace support for parenting (Peper et al. 2014), there are unwritten rules and an awareness among employees about the risks in prioritizing family over work commitments.

In our survey of Swedish parents, this was most apparent among fathers working in the private sector, in which expectations about performance, promotion and success underlay their responses. As one father, aged 40, with medium level of education working as engineer in the private sector, put it:

"I have never, in the 20 years that I have been here, had someone tell me that I need to work overtime. However, you know what needs to be done and you take your responsibility. So, no one needs to tell you that you should work overtime but rather it's something you do when it's necessary." (Hobson et al. 2014: 72)

We found very few cases of outright discrimination since in Sweden formally an employer cannot treat someone differently who claims his parenting rights. In actual practice, we found some tensions in workplaces, where fathers are seen as shirkers when they prioritize family: Take, for example, this father working in a warehouse who felt he was in vulnerable position in the firm because he often took days off to care for a sick child. "There's a lot of talk behind the back. Partly it's been suggested that some people think that you're lying if you're home with sick children, or that there are some mean-spirited rumors." (Father, 28-years old, three children, medium education) (Hobson et al. 2014: 77)

Nonetheless, among employees, primarily in white collar professional jobs, there are indications of changing norms in the organization of work. For instance, some men and women in our survey claimed that meetings were rarely scheduled in early morning or late in the day, so as not to interfere with taking children to and from daycare or after-school care. Another example we found was that fathers and mothers with young children were rarely asked to attend conferences or meetings on weekends (Hobson et al. 2014).

Swedish parents in our sample, regardless of education and skill, had a keen sense of what they considered to be a family-friendly workplace: Parents portrayed a family-friendly work culture as one in which their employers and workmates demonstrated understanding and support for parents on parental leave or those off from work caring for sick children. They cited examples of specific policies and work organizational practices. Family friendliness was associated with flexibility: having the ability to plan the work day, having flexible work hours, being able to work from home, and even being able to bring children to work if the childcare center or school was not open that day (Hobson et al. 2014).
2. Work organizational culture and the sense of entitlement

Using a unique data set of all firms in Stockholm, Bygren and Duvander (2004) found that work organizational culture was a determining factor for men’s claims for parental leave, that the likelihood of fathers taking leave and the proportion of leave were dependent upon previous men’s parental leave practices in the firm, after controlling for education, time in the firm, and firm size (see Figure 3 above). These findings suggest that the sense of entitlement to claim rights for parenting could be fostered by the work environment, that the sense of entitlement was embedded in workplace organizational cultures. There is little disagreement that work environments in public sector workplaces tend to be more family-friendly than those in the private sector (Duvander and Johannson 2012). Hobson et al. (2006) found that differences also exist within the public sector, that men employed at the central state level took less parental leave than those working in municipalities, most likely reflecting the higher proportion of women in municipal work organizations. Haas and Hwang (2009, 2016) found a class gradient in firms: that blue-collar fathers receive significantly less formal and informal support for taking parental leave than white-collar fathers do; and that this gap in formal programs has increased over time.

V. The Global Level: Processes, Trans-national Actors and Institutions

1. Processes

There is growing recognition of the importance of locating gender relations within global and transnational contexts. In the current research on global and trans-national dimensions more attention is being paid to how global processes, institutions and actors are shaping men, masculinities and fatherhood (Connell 2014; Hearn 2015).

Global interconnectedness is visible in both the re-configuration of states markets and families in welfare states and their effects on individual lives (referred to as the glocal in Hearn 2015). Since the global crisis and recession, the penetration of global processes has become more salient, both in national government policies as well as everyday practices in families.

Two caveats are in order when considering the effects of the crisis on WLB policy and practices. One is that the effects varied across European countries as did the austerity measures imposed on them, which can be seen in the effects on WLB policies. Cuts have been made in WLB policies, particularly in European countries where the bite of the crisis cut deep into the economy. For example parental leave benefits were reduced or leaves shortened in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain, UK, Iceland (O’Brien 2013) and Slovenia (Hobson 2014b). However, fathers’ leave policies were not reduced in most countries and were actually expanded in others, such as Germany (Schaefer 2016 in this volume). In Sweden WLB policies appear firmly entrenched, supported by all the main political parties: they are integrated into the decision-making of parents.

![Figure 3. Expected use of parental leave at father's workplace considering proportion of men who had taken some leave](source: Bygren and Duvander (2004))
when they plan a family and organize care and employment in daily life. In fact, fathers’ parental leave increased 21 percent from 2008 to 25 percent in 2015.

Second, many of the outcomes ascribed to the recession among European countries were tendencies already present in the restructuring of welfare states and downsizing in firms: reductions in public sector jobs, leaner work forces, increasing work demands, and more precarious work situations (Bonoli and Navali 2012; Bosch et al. 2009). Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that these common tendencies do not represent convergence in policies or the triumph of a new neoliberal order. Here, Peter Hall’s (2007) analysis of how neoliberalism is translated into national architectures is relevant: he argues that responses to global processes reflect adaptation to welfare state change embedded in histories, cultural norms and policy trajectories. Swedish dual-earner family policies have been fairly resilient to post-recession pressures.

2. Trans-national institutions and actors

The European Union has played a key role in promoting policies for gender equality; equal pay, non-discrimination in promotion and in pensions, gender neutral parental leaves, and targets for childcare coverage. Nonetheless, regarding the barriers to agency and capabilities for WLB, one cannot ignore the role of the EU in its neoliberal agenda, including ceilings on deficits and pressures to reduce public expenditures through privatization of care services, advocated in EU discourse and policy papers (Morel 2015). The solution to care deficits advocated in European societies has been policies to support the expansion in private markets in “personal household services” that have a low wage labor force, of which migrants comprise a large share. This strategy fits together with other EU strategies to decrease unemployment that encourage de-regulation and weakened job protections, which result in expansions in poor quality jobs (Morel 2015). Sweden has initiated one of the most generous tax subsidies for encouraging private markets in domestic services to solve the time deficit for dual-earner couples, which has produced a capabilities gap in WLB between families who can afford these services and those who cannot (Fahlén et al. 2015).

VI. Structural Inequalities and Capabilities for WLB

The agency and capabilities gap in WLB not only has an educational/skill dimension (discussed above), but also reflects structural changes, the expansion in temporary jobs and precarious employment. Though Sweden is considered the prototype of the coordinated economy within the Varieties of Capitalism (VOC) paradigm (Hall and Soskice 2001) with high proportions of union membership and in which most jobs are under collective agreements, there are high levels of temporary contracts (at 13.7 percent of total employees (OECD 2015); 16.9 percent of salaried employees (OECD 2015)). Here, Sweden is following a trend in many European countries, with increasing numbers of jobs without rights and protections (the insider/outsider effect (Palier 2010; Eurowork 2014)). Women and low-skilled men have been the dominant groups in these kinds of jobs. Now these types of jobs cut across gender, class and sector (Standing 2011).

We know from research on WLB that perception of insecure futures dampens the individual sense of entitlement to claim rights and take up policy options (Hobson 2014a). This has a stronger effect on fathers’ claims for WLB, since they are most often the main breadwinners. In Sweden many jobs are now permanently outsourced through private agencies—a significant proportion are in the public sector. Those working in these jobs have no protections to claim rights that others have—the right to return to the same job after parental leave and the right to request flexible hours.
VII. The Unfinished Gender Revolution

The concept of the unfinished gender revolution (Gerson 2010; Goldscheider et al. 2015), referred to by England (2014) as the stalled or incomplete revolution, captures both changes in gender roles around family and work as well as the constraints for change. The main argument is that women have changed, as seen in their increasing labor force, while the change in men’s caregiving has been less dramatic. In these debates the Swedish case leans toward the glass more half full than empty.

Men have started to take a more active role in caregiving in most countries (Devon and Moss 2002) and especially in Sweden. Throughout the 1990s, policymakers and feminist groups in Sweden used the argument that the daddy months could have a transformative effect on gender equality in the household and firm level. Still, the research on parental leave in Sweden reveals that only 8.7 percent of the fathers shared the leave fairly equally, defined here as 40/60 percent (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). A survey by the Swedish National Insurance Board found that one-fifth of the fathers would have liked to share the leave more equally, though few fathers said that they would prefer a 50–50 split (Hobson et al. 2006: 287), which was also confirmed by the interviews in our WLB capabilities survey (Hobson et al. 2014).

Considering the long-term effects of parental leave, there is somewhat more optimism in light of the research showing that fathers who use more of the parental leave tend to contribute more to household work and are more involved with the care of children (Duvander and Johansson 2012). There is also some evidence that when fathers use daddy months, there is a greater propensity to have a second child (Oláh 2003; Duvander and Anderson 2006). Though Swedish men on average do more housework than men in other European countries (Gershuny and Sullivan 2003), there is still an imbalance. The gender gap in household work has shrunk, but this is mainly due to the fact that women have significantly reduced their hours of unpaid work while men’s unpaid work hours has remained fairly constant, with only slight increases (Evertsson 2013). Evertsson (2013) found a five hour gap in the average hours spent on housework, 15 hours per week (women) and ten hours (men). The gap is slightly wider when children in the family are under eight years old.

The hours spent in the care of children by fathers and mothers in everyday life is more equal, though women still take the main responsibility for care in the family as revealed in their share of parental leave, their extension of the parental leave with a lower benefit, and their reduced working hours when children are under six (Goldscheider et al. 2015; Hobson et al. 2006). Some have attributed statistical discrimination of women in the labor market and the low proportions of women in managerial positions (the glass ceiling) to these very policies that have enabled them to combine employment with family (Mandel and Shalev 2009).

This aspect of statistical discrimination was echoed in one of our interviews with a senior male manager in a larger company, who himself took daddy leave. When asked if he would hire a woman for a managerial position, he clearly stated that it was not sustainable.

“If a 32- or 28-year old girl walks in on the verge of pregnancy, I know that there will be trouble involved in hiring a person like that. […] The company probably has an official policy that it isn’t a problem at all, but in a hiring situation I know that young women are mistreated…with travel and overtime project work, women with small children fail to deliver or quit.” (Father, 35 years old, senior project manager, private sector) (Hobson et al. 2014: 77).

As this quote suggests, rather than specific policies, it is the ways in which gendered norms in firms operate and the work organizational culture itself that pe-
nalizes not only women but also men who prioritize family. Without a systemic change in work organizational culture, how work is organized, and the assumptions underlying these practices, the revolution in gender equality will remain stalled or incomplete.

Another facet of the unfinished gender revolution is evident in the widening gap in WLB capabilities among parents with high incomes, tertiary education and a foothold in the labor market. With the emergence of private domestic services, supported by a generous government subsidy (covering 50 percent of the costs), those who can afford these services are best able to solve the time deficit in families in dual-earner societies. In a recent web-based survey we conducted, fathers and mothers using the tax subsidy claimed that the outsourcing of domestic services had led to an improvement in quality of life: reduced stress, having more time for family and friends, less tension with spouses and partners (Fahlén et al. 2015). Interestingly in our survey of WLB in 2008, when we asked what would lead to a better WLB, both mothers and fathers noted relief from housework. The tax subsidy has benefited only a small proportion of Swedish families with the most resources (Fahlén et al. 2015). The government support of private markets in care and domestic work suggests a shift away from the universalism in Swedish policy and the discourse of solidarities.

Despite these neoliberal tendencies in the Swedish welfare state, it remains one of most family-friendly and father-friendly societies where policies have had an impact on the workplace and in the household, particularly when considering men’s capabilities and agency for WLB. Looking beyond the state the question arises: Can the father-friendly welfare state be sustained in our era of global competitiveness, work intensity, leaner welfare budgets, and greater precariousness, all of which sit uncomfortably alongside men’s aspirations to be more involved fathers?

VIII. Lessons to be Learned from the Swedish case for WLB in Japan

Research in this thematic issue clearly shows that Japanese fathers have aspirations for making change in WLB. Yet Japanese fathers show the widest agency gap in WLB between existing policies and practices: Japanese men score at the bottom of WLB among OECD countries (cited in Takahashi et al. 2014b). Can the Swedish case provide a lens in finding strategies for making change?

In light of the high birthrates and high levels of women’s employment in Sweden, issues that are very much on the agenda in Japan, there has been a great deal of interest in the Swedish Model among Japanese policymakers. This is reflected in the numbers of researchers and policymakers who have come to Sweden over the last years and the visit of the Swedish minister of equality to Japan last year.

Undoubtedly, it is difficult to import models from one society to another with different histories, cultural norms, and institutions. Still there are lessons to be learned. The historical account of the evolution of the daddy months presented in this paper argues for a holistic approach, the importance of policy packages, not just one reform, but many reforms working in tandem supported the emergence of the dual-earner family model and the seeding of new norms for father involvement in care, including care leaves, childcare and the individual tax policy.

Specific policies do matter and the data show that targeted leave for fathers has led to increased use of that policy in many countries (Ray et al. 2010), but the strong sense of entitlement to claim WLB in Sweden is embedded in layers of context. As illustrated in the multi-dimensional model of capabilities and agency for WLB (see above), the firm level is a crucial component in the capabilities and agency for WLB, and the Swedish case underscores how workplace support for WLB needs to be buttressed by strong unions with a
gender equality agenda, and promoted in media discourse (Peper et al. 2014). Essential for implementation of WLB is the political will of governments to enforce policies. All of the above create the sense of entitlement to make WLB claims at the workplace (Hobson 2014a).

Another lesson from the Swedish case is that cultural norms around breadwinning and care are difficult to dislodge. This involves more than the “doing of gender” in everyday life (West and Zimmerman 1987), i.e., individual challenges at the household and workplace. Rather it entails structural changes and transformations in how work is organized, for example, when meetings are held, whether employees are expected to work weekends and evenings and fundamental changes to the long working-time regimes. This includes regulating new forms of flexible work where workers do not have to be present at the workplace, alongside challenging the assumption among managers that employees will be on call and wired at all times of the day and night.

In Sweden, there has been strong support for a shorter work week; men do not have a sense of entitlement to claim reduced working hours. The lesson here is that working hours cannot just be cast in terms of choice, but as a consequence of institutionalized practices. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Japan, where the long working days result literally in death by overwork (Karoshi). The new research thrust in WLB has called for a shift in the discourse on WLB, away from the conventional studies of work to life conflict, but toward a discourse on health and sustainability of future generations (Kossek et al. 2014). In our research we framed WLB as a core value for achieving wellbeing and quality of life in which both mothers and fathers have the opportunity to participate in family life and working life, as well as have time for friends and to develop their own interests outside of work (Hobson 2014b).

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