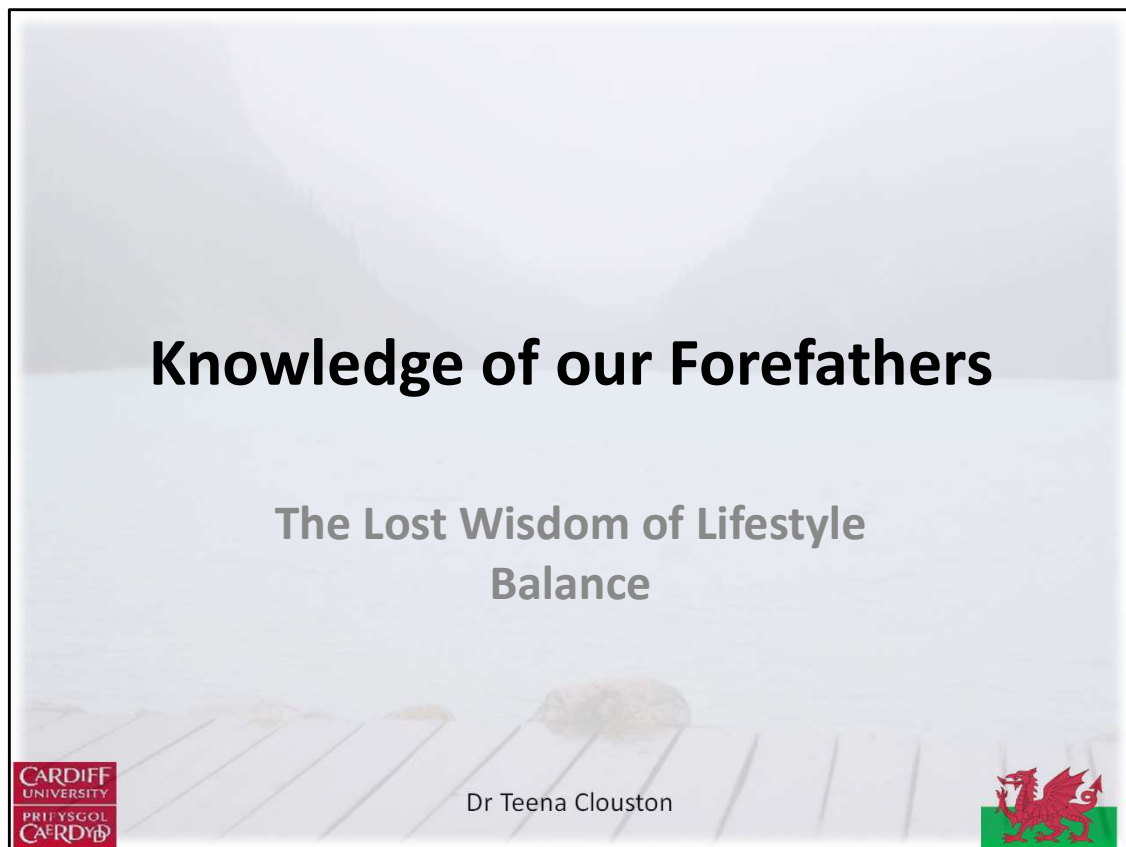




Good afternoon

.....My name is Teena Clouston and I come from Cardiff University in Wales, a small and beautiful part of the UK

The title of this paper summarises the content the I hope to convey. In essence I aim to show that we have much to learn from the early and more recent thinkers and theorists in occupational therapy and science as well as other key thinkers in sociology and philosophy in the early 20th century about **the impact of work-life imbalance on occupational balance.**

The premises underlying this paper are based on a study that explored the work-life and occupational balance of occupational therapists living and working in the UK. **BUT and this is the crux of the matter their experiences will be shared by many of us across the globe who are working and living in neoliberal market economies.**

Finding Balance in Working Life

- 29 Occupational therapists working in the UK experience work-life imbalance
- Prioritised paid work
- Limited time
- Limited energy – physical, psychological, cognitive and psychic energy to engage in or give focused attention (Csikszentmihalyi 1997)
- Caused stress and pressure and created imbalance



The study found that work-life imbalance was chronic for the majority of the 29 occupational therapy participants and that this prevented occupational balance

So why? Why was work-life imbalance causing occupational imbalance?

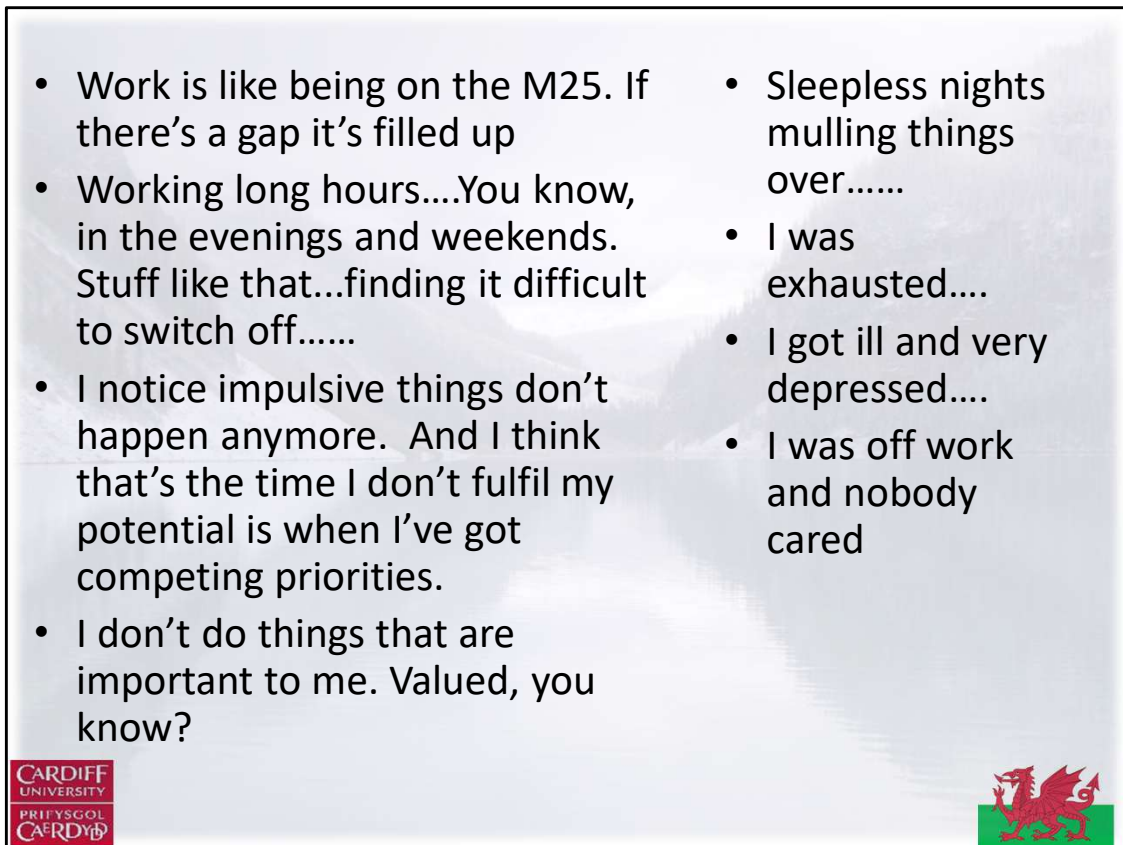
Well for all the OTs, whether working full-time or part-time their lives were overbusy; all were working longer hours than they were contracted for, and all found they were pressured outside of paid work, whether that be in the home domain, squashing family commitments into the time that was available to them around paid work; or in other life activities, describing limited social and leisure pursuits and few if any, reflective or being type of activities.

In simple terms with one or two notable exceptions they tended to spend too much time in paid work to the conflict or exclusion of other activities and this was challenging *because* paid work was prioritised by them as a matter of course in everyday life leaving limited time AND ENERGY for the rest of life activities.

Notably all aspects of energy were challenged. This included physical energy that is, the practical doing energy; psychological or emotional energy - the feeling & relationship energy; the cognitive or thinking energy and finally the energy for engagement or focused attention, what Csikszentmihalyi has called 'psychic energy'.

Essentially then when time and all those types of energy are overused then time for life beyond work becomes lost and occupational imbalance occurs leading to pressure and

ill-health.



- Work is like being on the M25. If there's a gap it's filled up
- Working long hours....You know, in the evenings and weekends. Stuff like that...finding it difficult to switch off.....
- I notice impulsive things don't happen anymore. And I think that's the time I don't fulfil my potential is when I've got competing priorities.
- I don't do things that are important to me. Valued, you know?
- Sleepless nights mulling things over.....
- I was exhausted....
- I got ill and very depressed....
- I was off work and nobody cared

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So how did the OTs express this? What did they say?

Well people described paid work as

“like being on the M25 ...”If there's a gap its filed up”. Now the M25 is a very busy road in the UK around London which is basically always jammed and is more like a car park than an journey or movement forward. Consequently this is a metaphor for too many things happening, to many jobs and not enough time to do it resulting in physical overwork the physical erosion of time and energy

They also talked about the spillover of paid work into other life domains “Working long hours....You know, in the evenings and weekends. Stuff like that...finding it difficult to switch off.....

This is of course a symptom of worry and that is caused by the overuse of psychological and cognitive time and energy worrying about pressures and causing stress exhaustion and burnout.

They also spoke of the loss of spontaneity, focus, interest, enjoyment and basically engagement in life; (this is the psychic energy) for example saying “I notice impulsive things don't happen anymore. And I think that the time I don't fulfil my potential is when I've got competing priorities...” AND I don't do things that are valued to me. Valued, you know?

So what was the outcome of this?. Well they described a liturgy of ill-health and stress, people talking about “Sleepless nights mulling things over”...being exhausted....becoming ill both physically and psychologically and feeling that nobody cared about that in the workplace....so a lack of care or recognition or pressure and stress

This lack of feeling cared about or supported in the workplace was endemic in the study participants and that was very demoralising.

So the questions must be why. Why were people experiencing this and why was nothing being done about it?

Why was paid work prioritised?

- There is not time to do everything but every 'doing' has its time. These fragments form a hierarchy, but work remains to a large extent essential...the reference to which we try to refer everything else back (Lefebvre 2004, p74).



Henri Lefebvre a French philosopher and sociologist who studied everyday life in the 20th century has suggested that in modern neoliberal capitalism paid work is prioritised because it is considered **the** essential occupation for all men and women of working age to participate in because it is the tool of production and economic growth and capital.

“There is not time to do everything but every ‘doing’ has its time. These fragments form a hierarchy, but work remains to a large extent essential...the reference to which we try to refer everything else back”

Now in terms of occupational therapy if paid work is going to be the central tenet of life, the one activity against which we measure all the others in life, and we naturally exclude other activities to achieve participation in paid work then we are going to be in a state of ***occupational imbalance because balance requires engagement in a variety of meaningful AND different occupations in life.***

Wisdom of Rhythm

The whole of the human organism has its shape in a kind of rhythm. It is not enough that our hearts should beat in a kind of rhythm, always kept to a standard at which it can meet rest as well as wholesome strain without upset. There are many other rhythms that we must be attuned to: the larger rhythms of night and day, of sleep and waking hours, of hunger and its gratification, and finally the big four – work and play, rest and sleep, which our organism must be able to balance even in difficulty (Meyer 1922:7).



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According to Adolph Meyer, one of the forefathers of occupational therapy we need to understand the **wisdom of rhythm**

“The whole of the human organism has its shape in a kind of rhythm. It is not enough that our hearts should beat in a kind of rhythm, always kept to a standard at which it can meet rest as well as wholesome strain without upset. There are many other rhythms that we must be attuned to: the larger rhythms of night and day, of sleep and waking hours, of hunger and its gratification, and finally the big four – work and play, rest and sleep, which our organism must be able to balance even in difficulty”

In simple terms Meyer is talking about the lost knowledge of rhythm both internal (biological) and external (the social and natural worlds) and the wisdom of link between them.....

Wisdom of Work

- We should appreciate 'The true religion of work [is] when fitted rightly into the rhythms of individual and social and cosmic nature' (Meyer 1922:9)
- A dynamic equilibrium or ecological sense of balance



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He also talked about the **wisdom of work** and pointed out that if paid work was to be in harmony with occupational balance, we should appreciate that

the 'the true religion of work [is when it is] fitted rightly into the rhythms of individual and social and cosmic nature' (Meyer 1922:9).

In this sense Meyer is promoting balance as a dynamic equilibrium or an ecological sense of balance and advocates that we try to balance our individual equilibrium with those of the social and natural worlds.

The Wisdom of Balance

...a dynamic balance between **doing** and **being** is central to healthy living and wellness...**Doing** is often used a synonym for occupation within our profession....and is so important it is impossible to envisage the world of humans without it. **Being** encapsulates such notions as nature and essence, about being true to ourselves, to our individual capacities and in all that we do. **Becoming** adds to the idea of a sense of the future and hold notions of transformation and self-actualization (Wilcock 1999:1).



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As occupational therapists and scientists, we know, as Wilcock has clearly described, the wisdom of balance is in **doing activities, which** are essential to human nature (and paid work is a doing activity) **BUT and this the key, one many of us have forgotten**, this kind of doing activity has to be balanced with **being** and **becoming** activities if occupational balance is to be experienced.

Being is about recognising and celebrating our oneness with nature and about being true to our selves – it is about knowing who we are and what we find meaning in.

Ask yourself this question ...what is it you truly want to do in life? What is it you really enjoy and gain a sense of personal meaning from? **Then ask yourself are you doing it?** If not you should be because this is what gives you your occupational identity and It is having that sense of self that is imperative to achieving personal transformation and self-actualisation.

In this context think not only about yourself but also link it to our practice. Ask yourself in our therapy do we forget about being and becoming activities and do we focus too much on doing with our clients?

Wisdom of Variety

- Wilcock (1999) has suggested we need a balance between active 'doing' and a reflexive or integrative sense of 'being' in the natural and social worlds and time for self-actualising or 'becoming' to capture a sense of wellbeing in everyday life
- Requires balance in social activities but also between the social and natural worlds



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This leads onto the **wisdom of variety in life**. As previously mentioned, Wilcock has described this as a balance between the different dimensions of active 'doing' and a reflexive or integrative sense of 'being' in the natural and social worlds with time for self-actualising or 'becoming' time to capture a sense of wellbeing in everyday life

This however, as we have just discussed, requires balance not only in personal and meaningful activities but also between the self and the social and natural worlds: an interconnected or an ecological sense of balance.

In this sense it is sad that in present everyday life we tend to **use our** natural capital for economic gain not as a means of self fulfilment by spending time in nature and appreciating its beauty. We use and abuse not love and nurture our planet.

If we know this to be true how can we change **this when we spend so much time and energy in paid work?** So how could we change this practice and way of being with paid work in its present form?

Wisdom of Time

If every man and woman worked 4 hours a day at necessary work, we would all have enough...it should be the remaining hours that would be regarded important – hours which could be devoted to enjoyment of art or study, to affection and woodland and sunshine in green fields...Man's true life does not consist [just] of the business of filling his belly and clothing his body, but in art and thought and love, in the creation and contemplation of beauty and....understanding of the world (Russell and Russell 1923, p.50).



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So how could we change this practice and way of being with paid work in its present form?

According to Bertram Russell, a British philosopher in the early 20th century in collaboration with his wife Dora Russell, we need to learn the wisdom of how we use our time and he challenges us to do it :

If every man and woman worked 4 hours a day at necessary work, we would all have enough...it should be the remaining hours that would be regarded important – hours which could be devoted to enjoyment of art or study, to affection and woodland and sunshine in green fields...Man's true life does not [just] consist of the business of filling his belly and clothing his body, but in art and thought and love, in the creation and contemplation of beauty and understanding of the world.

Whilst this is perhaps quite idealistic, like Meyer, he advocates a balance or harmony of paid work with other activities in life and suggests that in this we can find beauty and understanding in the world.

The great thing about this idea is that working 4 hrs. a day gives work to more people and shares out the symbolic, social and economic capital that this entails creating a fairer society

Wisdom of Meaning

No matter how rich and comfortable we get, no matter how much time we are able to be free from obligation, the quality of experience is not going to improve one bit unless we learn to invest our psychic energy in ways that will bring intrinsic rewards.

From this perspective a good society is one that succeeds in providing a meaningful plan for the investment of psychic energy, an investment that brings enjoyment to every act of daily life, and that allows for the growth of complexity in consciousness for as many of its people as possible.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988 p, 379)



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Csikszentmihalyi has argued we that whilst we can free up time to do other things and spend time in nature and in other pursuits they must **have personal meaning to sustain our psychic energy reserves and this is about the Wisdom of meaning**

A really important message in Csikszentmihalyi's ideas is that finding this meaning is bigger than the individual - it is about the whole of us....it is about investing time and energy in each other our society - our networks and meaningful relationships as well as ourselves and our planet

Wisdom of Occupational Balance

‘Time, rhythm, activity are beacon lights of the philosophy of the occupation worker..... Rhythm operates throughout nature. The healthy human organism pulsates rhythmically between rest and activity, using and living and acting its time in harmony with its own nature and the nature about it, and feeling itself to be a self-guiding energy-transformer in the real world of living things’ (Franklin 1922:422).



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So what does this mean for us as occupational therapists and scientists? Well according Bertha Franklin an occupational therapist and devotee of Meyer publishing in the British Journal of Psychiatry in 1922

Time, rhythm, activity are beacon lights of the philosophy of the occupation worker..... Rhythm operates throughout nature. The healthy human **organism pulsates rhythmically between rest and activity, using and living and acting its time in harmony with its own** nature and the nature about it, and feeling itself to be a self-guiding energy-transformer in the real world of living things’

Thus the role of occupational therapy and science is not only to promote a balance of occupations in everyday life to assure wellbeing but to embed that into our own essential nature and the social and natural worlds of which we are a part and this I hope is the essential lesson for you to take away today.

Thank you

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- Further reading
- Clouston TJ (forthcoming 2015) *Worked Out and Still Wanting: Finding Balance in Busy Lives*, London, Jessica Kingsley
- Clouston TJ (in press) “Whose Occupational Balance is it Anyway? The Challenge of Neoliberal Capitalism and Work-Life Imbalance” *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*



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Thank you