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## Working Time Capability Under the Hegemony of Neoliberalism

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**Abstract:**

*This paper talks about white-collar employees by using the concept of “Working time capability” under the hegemony of neoliberalism. Under neoliberal economic growth, the position of the working class in the Third World country has been weakened, as a result the white-collar employees are experiencing high job pressure in the workplace. Since, the Third World countries are considered as developing country, therefore, to attain economic growth private organizations are having full control over the employees. As a result, employees are more often forced by the private organizations to work for extended hours, since the organizations retain the controlling power through retrenchment. This paper also puts emphasis on the Bangladeshi private banks, whereby the employees serve banking customers under competitive pressure. Due to increasing workload, job insecurity, work deadlines, long working hours and performance pressure from management; employees working with the Bangladeshi private banks perceive high job stress, and eventually they experience work-life imbalance.*

**Keywords:** Neoliberalism, Working time capability, Third World, Bangladesh, Work-life Balance, White-collar employees, private banks

This review critically reviews two articles “Working time capability: Towards realizing individual choice” by Lee and McCain which appeared in Progress in International Labour Office paper, and “Global Rise Of Neoliberal State And Its Impact On Citizenship: Experiences In Developing Nations” by Haque which appeared in Asian Journal of Social Science. This review will first summarize their arguments. Secondly, it will briefly analyze the effectiveness of these articles structure, investigating how the information is set out, and whether the reader can access it efficiently. Thirdly, the review will critique these articles, evaluating their authority, accuracy, relevance, objectivity and stability. The first article talks about the concept of “working time capability”, and the later talks about “neoliberalism”. The reason behind combining these two articles is to show the working situation of the white-collar workers under the hegemony of neoliberalism (particularly in the third world), and how it can be minimized through the concept of “working time capability”.

Haque (2008) in his article, talks about the features of neoliberalism that affects the “third world” countries. He talks about how countries like Bangladesh, India, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand; the state has become supportive to the private sector with regard to finance, investment, marketing, and negotiation. Focusing on private sector rather than public sectors replaces the role of the state (the tendency of less state intervention), which indeed represents neoliberal policy prescription from the “West” to the “third world” countries. As George (1999) stated, “*The central value of . . . neoliberalism itself is the notion of competition – competition between nations, regions, firms and of course between individuals. Competition is central because it separates the sheep from the goats, the men from the boys [sic] and the fit from the unfit. It is supposed to allocate all resources, whether physical, natural, human or financial, with the greatest possible efficiency.*” Therefore, it is clear that neoliberalism creates competition, thus it creates conflict among the white-collar workers in terms of achieving Work-Life Balance (henceforth WLB). The concept of WLB is understood as the trade-off between time and money respecting commitments to employment or care. WLB concerns people’s degree of control over when, where and how they work. Such a balance is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as a norm, to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society (Pandolfini, 2012).

Haque (2008) argues that the neoliberal reformation in the “third world” countries has several positive outcomes in terms of efficiency, competition, and performance. However, these factors became the forces to overlook the adverse impacts on people’s living standards. The author also stated, with regard to the employment situation, the period of structural adjustment pursued by the neoliberal state has not been that promising for many Asian, African, and Latin American countries where the common people feel increasing job insecurity and are losing jobs due to massive retrenchment.

Therefore, I will argue these factors create fears among the white-collar workers as a result; white-collar workers are willing to give up their “time” preferences to the private organization that leads organizations to control worker’s WLB (more intense in the “third world countries”). To make my argument stronger, I would quote Harris and Seid (2000), “*the neoliberal economic reforms undertaken by the governments of the developing countries have also increased the transfer of income from the lower and middle classes to the upper classes, and greatly weakened the position of the working class*”. Therefore, the notion of Margaret

Thatcher's "*There Is No Alternative*" (TINA), broadly known as no alternative but to adopt "neoliberalism" (Munck, 2003) is not applicable in the "third world" countries.

Lee and McCain (2006) in their article, talks about workers increased working time. They argue real individualization is based on workers' needs and preferences. Lee and McCain (2006) applied the concept of "capabilities approach" developed by Sen in order to elaborate and interpret workers' needs and preferences under the hegemony of neoliberalism. As I argued, based on Haque (2008) that the working class under the neoliberal hegemony became weakened, and organizations became more powerful. As a result, different approaches were implemented in different organizations (particularly in the developed world) to minimize such conflict between organizations and working class (Drago & Kashian, 2003), some common approaches are "scarcity hypothesis", "WLB", "Quality of Life", and so on. In contrast, emerging economies have been slow to pick up the trend, because they have a more gendered distribution of work and family roles. Consequently, there is not sufficient understanding of the manner in which recent economic growth interacts with historical, social and institutional factors, within these countries, and how it affects the work and non-work lives of employees (Rajadhyaksha, 2012).

As an illustration, I will put emphasis on a private sector (banks) in a "third world" country – Bangladesh, in order to explain the employee situation under the hegemony of neoliberalism. In the case of Bangladesh, employees who are working in the banking sectors are directly related with the overall economic development of Bangladeshi economy (such as direct foreign investment, private investment, marginal propensity to save, government borrowing and export-import development) (Rahman et al., 2006). Therefore, a rapid expansion of private banks has taken place from the mid-1990s to present (Rahman et al., 2013). This rapid expansion of the private banking business occurred along with customized services such as internet banking, mobile banking, and 24x7-customer service. These services result in employees working for long hours. At present, there are 30 private local banks operated in Bangladesh (Ahmad & Khanal, 2007). Employees of a private bank serve banking customers under competitive pressure. Due to increasing workload, job insecurity, work deadlines, long working hours and performance pressure from management, employees of private banks in Bangladesh perceive high job stress, and eventually they experience work-life imbalance (Rahman et al., 2013).

Therefore, based on Haque (2008), Lee and McCain (2006) arguments, I will now extend my argument that is, indeed neoliberal reform may attain economic growth. However, under neoliberal reform employees (white-collar workers) are working extensive hours, since the organizations retain the controlling power through retrenchment. Nevertheless, the employees are not getting any opportunity to attain WLB, since they do not have the opportunity to choose and change their working time to improve the quality of their life. As a result, employees are bound by the neoliberal reforms, that make organizations powerful, and employees weakened. That ultimately reflects neoliberal reform overlooks the aspects of employee well-being.

As a result, employees working in the private sector (e.g., Bangladeshi banking sectors) have no option, but to accept the rules and regulations imposed by the organizational management. Now, the aim of this paper is to put emphasis on employee well-being in the private banking sectors in Bangladesh.

As Lee and McCain (2006) talks about the potential solution of attaining WLB through "capabilities approach", therefore the paper will emphasis on the features of Sen's approach. The extended concept of "capabilities approach" as "working time capability" reflects the substantive freedom to adopt different working time patterns. From this perspective, attention needs to be paid not only to the hours that workers are working now, but also to the options from which they have had the opportunity to choose. However, such concept has some drawbacks, such as the capability of a worker and the level of poverty in that country. Since, this issue of Work-Life Balance is intense in the "third world"; therefore, the poverty level is relatively high in the "third world" (Lee and McCain, 2006). Additionally, low paid white-collar employee will tend to work more hours, on the other hand high paid workers will tend to work less hours. However, as Sen said, "responsibility requires freedom . . . Without the substantive freedom and capability to do something, a person cannot be responsible for doing it." (Lee and McCain, 2006).

Under the concept of "working time capability", employees will be able to choose "time" among the set of feasible, alternative combinations (e.g., daily working hours). In my opinion, having such arrangement would allow people to split working time among the other employees. As a result, all the employees will be able to get reasonable hours of working. In addition, such concept will also help other people who are willing to enter into the job market. For an example, an employee who is willing to work 20 hours a week, instead of 50 hours a week, needs a replacement. As a result, the organization may need to hire a new employee or maybe another employee can do the rest 30 hours a week. Indeed, the opposite may happen as well. However, it is also true employees working under stressful condition, may affected by different types of mental and physical health issues.

At the global level, international agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, the World Trade Organization, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Bank, the African Development Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, have been engaged in influencing developing countries to adopt pro-market policies and programs as the preconditions for foreign loans or external assistance. Such policies and programs, which expanded opportunities for foreign investment, foreign ownership, and export market, have also been encouraged by economic experts, media networks, consultancy firms, and transnational corporations located in advanced capitalist nations. However, there are some interest within the developing world — including the ruling-party members, high-ranking officials, and business elites — who gained considerably from neoliberal reforms such as privatization that provided opportunities to make windfall profits from purchasing the underpriced public assets (Haque, 2008). However, all the factors are favoring the "West", and local elites. As a result, the working condition of employees in the private sectors in the "third world" are most often overlooked by these groups.

Therefore, I will urge to re-think the concept of "neoliberalism" for the working-class (white-collar workers) along with the concept of "working time capability". It is true that neoliberal reform may bring economic growth. However, attaining economic growth at the cost of pushing the working class to the extreme situation (working longer hours, stressful work) does not represent overall growth of a country. Therefore, the need of state intervention is necessary in the private sectors to monitor the working

conditions of white-collar employees. Government policies, such as applying the concept of “working time capability” may help the working class to attain WLB.

Lee and McCain (2006), and Haque (2008), talks about the consequence of neoliberal effect on the employees. However, compared to the developed countries the employees of “third world” countries have been more affected with these consequences. Both authors agree with the fact that neoliberalism may lead to economic growth; however, disagree with the fact that it is opposed to human well-being. However, none of the authors put emphasis on the concept of WLB for the employees in the “third world”, which has been missing under the hegemony of neoliberalism.

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