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**The role of line managers in negotiating order and attendance on the
food retail shop floor:**
A comparison between the UK and Cyprus food retail sector

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of line managers in managing attendance at work, within grocery retailing, providing a comparison between the UK and Cyprus. It explores the sector's political economy, discusses the impact on workplace attendance, explores the manifestations of attendance in the labour process, and examines the role of line managers in managing absence.

The empirical evidence draws on qualitative research from four case-study grocery retail organizations in the UK and Cyprus and reports on 91 semi-structured interviews with HR managers, store managers, line managers, union representatives and shop-floor employees.

The research evidence highlighted a drop in absence in all the case study organizations. In both countries, the economic crisis, the absence management process and the role of the line managers were major drivers for the employees' decision to attend work regularly, consenting to the attendance control and the shop floor regimes. The labour process analysis adopted in this study suggests that non-attendance as a form of industrial conflict is regarded as muted, while consent to regular attendance is built. Nevertheless, the data illustrated a latent behaviour by workers, across the four organizations, utilizing silent and individual actions to battle over workplace attendance. The research also highlights the role of line managers in managing attendance at work, as well as in negotiating the shop floor order. The thesis discusses the versatile role of the line managers in managing both attendance and the shop floor order, across the four case study organizations. The study also illustrates that the line managers were subjected to forces of control, holding limited authority and discretion. However, they developed tactics to cope and gain control within these processes.

The main contributions of this research are the similar organization of food retail work within the UK and Cyprus, the employees' consent to regular attendance, and the 'Rebels of the clock' thesis, which suggests the emergence of 'game playing', as an expression of industrial conflict. Finally, the versatile role of line managers in coercing and negotiating both workplace attendance and shop floor order is suggested, while these actors used informal actions to gain discretion and overcome the top-down control on their role within the attendance management process.

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1. Introduction

This thesis explores the role of line managers in managing and negotiating attendance in the 'lean' regime of grocery retailing. This competitive market and the involvement of the organizations in a 'retail war', make attendance a crucial element to secure competitiveness (Patton and Johns, 2012). As Taylor et al (2010) conclude, in highly competitive conditions within which the organizations are pressured to keep labour costs low, attendance becomes critical, particularly as staffing levels become leaner. In addition, the same authors suggest that more research is required, with a broader sectoral range, to gain a better understanding of absence control, whereas retail is described as an ideal case to be examined. This thesis adds to these arguments and suggests that attendance becomes even more important in the era of austerity, when organizations struggle to keep their profits high and their costs low. The particular research questions and objectives of this thesis are as follows:

1. To understand the political, economic and social structures and dynamics within the grocery retail sector in a comparative analysis
 - To explore the changes in the political economy of the grocery retail sector in the era of austerity, providing comparative research evidence and drawing on different regulating regimes and institutional parallels in UK and Cyprus and,
 - To understand the impact of the food-retail regime and the food retail sector political economy to the nature of work
2. To explore the dynamics of workplace attendance and absence management within the grocery- retail sector
 - To explore the management of absence in the 'lean' regime of grocery retailing and,
 - To examine how the dynamics of workplace attendance and absence manifest within the labour process
3. Examine the role of line managers in the management of absence and workplace attendance
 - To understand the role of line management in managing absence within the dynamics of the labour process of the grocery-retail stores and,
 - To explore the line managers' level of autonomy in managing attendance within the regime of grocery retailing.

Food retailers are involved in an ongoing price struggle and target the reduction of labour costs in order to achieve the lowest possible price for their customers. Indeed, grocers

globally follow a 'low-road strategy' aiming for lower prices through reduced labour costs. This is a phenomenon that Tilly (2007) calls 'Wal-Martization'. This trend indicates that Wal-Mart acts today as the archetype food retailer and is becoming the new corporate prototype (Lichtenstein, 2005). However, Wal-Mart, along with other major global retailers, have received major criticism on their employment practices (see Johansson, 2007; Neumark et al., 2008). The growing research on retail employment suggests that food retailers imitate Wal-Mart's labour practices and organize work following Taylorist principles, mainly in an attempt to achieve lower costs (Lichtenstein and Johansson, 2011). Sophisticated technology, low wages, limited career perspectives, strict supervision, part-time and flexible employment schemes, anti-union practices and high levels of control are endemic in the work organization (Carré et al., 2010; Royle, 2010). 'Wal-Martization' suggests that Taylorism is not a 'short-lived phenomenon'; rather it suggests that in the lean regime of food retailing a neo-Taylorist approach continues within employment relationships (Bratton et.al, 2007; Carls, 2009).

The low road strategy within retailing and the work organization are well discussed in labour research (Akehurst and Alexander, 1995; Appelbaum et al., 2005; Carré and Tilly, 2009; Grugulis and Bozkurt, 2011; Johansson, 2007). However, authors often discuss the retail job and the food retail job as homogeneous. Although, similarities exist within the two concepts, this research comes to explore in more detail the political, social and economic dynamics of food retailing, which are shaped and driven by the 'Wal-martization' trend. In addition, the changes in the sector's political economy, within the era of austerity, and the impact on the nature of work are explored. This thesis provides an international comparative analysis between the UK and Cyprus food retail sector. The two countries have a different history in grocery retailing, with the UK being a developed market and the origin of one of the 'top-three' global retailers, as well as an attractive market for other global grocery-retailing giants. On the other hand, the Cyprus market is a developing market, which over the last decade has been attracting investments by global grocery retailers. Yet, despite the different history in food retailing grocers in both countries organize work in a similar way following the neo-Tayloristic trend of 'Wal-Martization'. The comparison rationale also emerges from the similar IR systems in these two countries. The liberal economy of the UK is well discussed in the literature (Marchington et al., 2011). What is interesting is the influence of the UK system on the Cyprus' IR system as a result of its colonial history (Ioannou, 2011). Overall, this thesis

explores the dynamics of the work organization in two countries with similar IR systems, and a sector that follows a global similar trend that has its origins in 'Taylorism'.

Kristensen (1991) (cited in Johns, 1997; 138) argues that 'Taylorized' job designs result in higher levels of absenteeism, resulting in increased costs. Similarly, Martocchio (1992) and MacLean (2008) argue that there is a great deal of evidence to show that absenteeism produces significant costs, affecting bottom line results. Therefore, given the current economic crisis and the higher pressures for lower costs, attendance management becomes a priority for food retailers. Although managing attendance at work is a concept that has received much research attention within organizational research (Edwards and Scullion, 1982), this thesis accounts the business environment within which absence behaviour takes place (food retailing) (Kaiser, 1998), following Marcus and Smith's (1985, p.264) argument that research should examine absence behaviour in different occupational, organizational and industrial sectors. Although this argument was stressed three decades ago, this thesis, similar to Taylor et al. (2010), recognizes the need for a broader sectoral analysis.

This thesis explores the management of (short-term) absence on the supermarket shop floor and the manifestations of attendance in the labour process. It explores how workplace attendance and absence are part of the contested and antagonistic employment relationship in this sector. Limited research to date has explored the workplace and particularly the food retail shop floor as a 'contested terrain' (Edwards, 1979). Industrial sociologists have developed a significant discussion on control, conflict, and consent within the theoretical framework of the labour process (Thompson and Newsome, 2004). Nevertheless, limited research has investigated the actions of resistance and consent within food retailing, whereas authors have put limited effort to conceptualize the changing shape of workplace conflict. The theory on conflict has been developed and now the argument is more intensively suggesting that conflict has changed form (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Hodson, 1995), and it is more likely in contemporary capitalism to be expressed in a more silent, individual and unorganized form, such as absence (Mumby, 2005). Yet the question remains of how conflict is expressed within the lean regime of food retailing, and what part absence plays in the employment relationship. At the same time, the triadic model of the labour process theory recognizes control, resistance, and consent as endemic in the labour process. As Brown (1992) notes controlling of the labour process is a complex matter. Indeed, the employers have to secure employees' consent and at the same time

retain control over the labour process. Burawoy (1979) suggests that the capital still needs to secure the surplus value and this can only be achieved through mechanisms in which workers participate, rather than coercion. This thesis is interested in understanding the manifestation of attendance within the triadic model of the labour process, especially in an era of economic crisis and increasing unemployment in the two countries examined (Eurofound, n.d).

Finally, although authors suggest that attendance is a crucial feature of the employment relationship that needs to be controlled (Taylor et al., 2010), surprisingly there is limited research on the line managers' role within that process. Authors and HRM researchers have discussed extensively the devolution of HRM to the line. Indeed, the line managers' role has been expanded and became more managerial (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010), whereas a consistent theme found in the HRM literature is the devolution of HR responsibilities to the line (Lowe, 1992; Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Teague and Roche, 2012). However, limited research has examined the line managers' role in managing attendance, while even less knowledge is available regarding the day-to-day practices on the line regarding this process, as well as the line managers' authority and discretion within the latter (Edwards and Whiston, 1993). This thesis brings together the classic literature on supervisors and the contemporary discussions on HR devolvement to understand all these issues within the lean regime of food retailing.

Thurley and Hamblin (1963) argue that in different work situations there is a significant variation in supervisors' tasks and activities, while similarly Lambert and Henly (2012) suggest that managers' approach to everyday management tasks may vary. However, there is limited research examining the line managers' role in the food retail sector. Indeed, according to the classic writings of Child and Partridge (1982, 13–14) "it would be not fruitful to generalize about supervisors, away from the situations in which they work and research should be sensitive to the situation of work and to each supervisor's position". Therefore, it is important to modernize these discussions and understand whether the leaner working regime found in this sector, impacts on line managers' authority and their responsibility of managing attendance. This thesis looks beyond the extant research that plainly acknowledges line managers' involvement in administrating absence management policies. It investigates the discretionary elements of the line manager's role in managing attendance, rather than merely examining *whether* they are involved in attendance policies. Finally, this research evaluates the social and political dynamics of the managerial job to

provide an understanding of the line managers' attitudes towards their HR responsibility to manage attendance. It examines their experience within their own labour process and the wider social structure of the food retail shop floor.

1.1 Thesis structure

The thesis comprises nine chapters. To explore the above questions and to develop the problematic of this research, three distinct literature chapters were developed. The purpose of chapter 2 is to provide an outline regarding the political economy and the work organization in food retailing. Firstly, it introduces the 'Wal-Martization' trend, it discusses the price war in the sector and the pressures for lower costs, identifies the food retail employment characteristics, and concludes that these employment characteristics are potential sources of tension within the employment relationship.

Chapter 3 takes a sociological approach regarding the contested employment relationship in the sector. Following the discussion on Wal-Martization and the lean regime of food retailing, the chapter discusses the managerial control, which is embedded in the employment relationship, and locates attendance at work within the labour process. It recognizes the different meanings of attendance, drawing on the labour process theory and the control, resistance, consent model.

Chapter 4 conceptualizes the line managers' role within HRM and particularly within absence management. It stresses questions regarding their authority and discretion in managing attendance and locates the line management within the latter process. The chapter brings together two schools of thought regarding this area. Particularly, it discusses the managerial perspective regarding the devolvement of HRM to the line, identifies the main issues within this research, and discusses the industrial sociologists' debates regarding the involvement of line managers/supervisors within the employment relationship. This chapter sets the basis for a sociological analysis regarding the line managers' role in managing attendance, and insights into managerial practices on the food retail shop floor.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology of the research undertaken. The philosophical assumptions of the researcher, which are rooted in critical realism, and the epistemological considerations and the methodological approach undertaken for this research, are described. Within the latter discussion, the theoretical and the practical issues of the research strategy are discussed. This research adopts a qualitative approach and provides an international comparison between UK and Cyprus. It reports on 91 semi-structured

interviews with HR, senior and line managers, union representatives and employees. The two phases of primary data collection are outlined, whereas, finally, the thematic analysis of the data and the potential limitations of the research are discussed.

Chapters 6 to 8 outline the findings from the four case study organizations in the UK and Cyprus. Their purpose is to investigate the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the nature of work across the two countries, and provides an interpretation of the organization of work within both the UK and Cyprus. In line to Chapter 2, the Wal-martization trend is identified in the findings, suggesting the similar organization of work within food retailing in both countries, which is based on a low road strategy and suggests the contestation of the employment relationship. Chapter 7 illustrates the drop in absence in all cases and suggests that this drop has a complex explanation. Particularly, the current recession, the absence management and the role of line managers are the main drivers of the absence drop. Yet, as the data reveal, presenteeism is an emerging behaviour within all organizations. This chapter also investigates in detail the line managers' role in managing attendance and explores their authority within the process, as well as the day-to-day practices in absence management. Following the findings of Chapter 7, suggesting the drop in absence, Chapter 8 shows that although employees in all cases consented in attending work regularly, strong evidence across both countries showed a latent behaviour by employees regarding attendance. This final findings chapter describes the contestation and negotiation of workplace attendance on the food retail shop floor, and explores the dimensions of (silent) conflict and consent making in all the case study organizations.

Finally, Chapter 9 identifies the key findings of the thesis and discusses their relevance to the literature. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the implications of this study on existing knowledge regarding the management of absence and working time in food retailing, to understand the devolution of this task to the line and the implications on the line managers' role. This chapter discusses the distinct contributions of this research and proposes areas for future research.

2. The food retail sector political economy

This chapter discusses the political economy of the food retail sector. First, the ‘Wal-Martization’ trend is introduced, whilst next the employment characteristics within the sector are analysed. The chapter suggests that the internationalization of food retailing and the ‘Wal-Mart effect’ results in an organization of work that is characterized by low wages, part-time work, managerial control, anti-union practices and deskilling. The chapter concludes that these employment characteristics shape the contested employment relationship on the supermarket shop floor.

2.1 Wal-Martization: A global trend

The escalating power and domination of the supermarkets in the contemporary service economy has been subject to increasing public policy and academic attention. The history of retail development reveals three major changes in food retailing, namely ‘supermarketization’, ‘globalization’, and modern discounting/‘Wal-Martization’ (Tilly, 2007).

‘Supermarketization’, or alternatively the Americanization of the market, is maybe one of the most important developments in the sector, which introduced self-service and shaped the format of the contemporary supermarket store (Tilly, 2007). This was adopted by multiple businesses in both America and Europe, while it was fully developed to the format that it is known today in the post-war period (Shaw et al., 2004). In the late-1960s, the self-service method was introduced on the shop floor, leading to other developments, such as the appearance of new types of stores, such as superstores and hypermarkets (Seth and Randall, 2001). The emergence of new store formats generated a related trend in grocery retailing, with size playing an important role in competitiveness (Bell et al., 2004; Seth and Randall, 2005). The average size of the shop floor was constantly increasing (Dimopoulos and Sayas, 2011; Seth and Randall, 2001), whilst unsurprisingly in the 1980s thousands of small shops closed down their business, giving room to supermarkets to rise. Consequently, the 1990s saw a dramatic change to the way people shopped, moving away from the small shops to the larger formats of hypermarkets (Lang and Baring, 2007).

During this period, the crucial trend of globalization also emerged. This explains why today the industry is dominated by a few multinational grocers (Freathy and Sparks, 1995; IGD, 2014; Korczynski, 2002). This trend was first introduced by the German Metro and the French Carrefour in the 1960s, whilst surprisingly Wal-Mart and Tesco were the last two players that went global (Bell et al., 2004; Tilly, 2007). The pioneer retailer of the 21st

century (Wal-Mart) did not globalize its business until 1991, whilst surprisingly, Tesco, the leader grocer in Britain, and the third largest global grocery retailer, was also slow to adopt a global strategy (Seth and Randall, 2005). Although these global grocery retailers have decided to go international in different periods, they are presented as the most successful supermarkets.

The success of these companies is the outcome of the third dimension proposed by Tilly - 'modern discounting'. This trend suggests that the organization through large volumes of sales and lower prices develops economies of scale and increases its competitiveness. This norm is followed by all the 'Big four' grocers today, who are unavoidably involved in a 'retail war' (Seth and Randall, 2001). Yet, Wal-Mart is the largest global practitioner of this dimension; therefore Tilly (2007) calls this final trend as "*Wal-Martization*".

Featherstone (2004) describes "Wal-Martization" as a process that is happening worldwide. Although Wal-Mart was one of the last grocers that went global, it is today, according to Lichtenstein (2005), the archetype of supermarkets. The author argues that 'there is a shift from General Motors to Wal-Mart being today the new corporate prototype, operating as a world transforming institution, driving major changes in social, urban, labour and global issues for the 21st century' (p.21). Likewise, Johansson (2007, p.1465) reports that 'Wal-Mart may be the new General Motors, but instead of moving the country forward, Wal-Mart is driving our workers in reverse'. Adams (2006, p.213) also reports that 'Wal-Mart has become the paradigmatic representation of a new age in the history of capitalism', in line with Lichtenstein's (2006a) argument that Wal-Mart is the face of the 21st century capitalism. The two authors argue that Wal-Mart's employment practices, such as anti-union tactics, gender discrimination, cost cutting, managerial control, low wages, and part-time work, are imitated by its competitors and are subjected to increased criticism by labour activists, the media, and the public. Lichtenstein (2006b) discusses the influence of Wal-Mart over the economy and the food retail sector, suggesting it as the template corporation, that sets the standards for work, not only for American workers, but also for workers across the globe and also represents the standards for a new age in the history of capitalism.

Arnold and Fernie (2000) note that Wal-Mart's objective is to become the McDonalds of retailing. Ritzer (2004) reports that different types of business other than fast-food, including Wal-Mart, are following 'McDonaldization' as a fundamental part of their global success. McDonalds is considered as the most influential corporate development in modern

society as, similarly to Wal-Mart, it has influenced the way of life across the globe. However, McDonalds, similarly again to Wal-Mart and other global retailers, has been criticized for its employment practices (Blythman, 2005; Johansson, 2007; Neumark et al., 2008; Royle, 2010; UFCW, 2008), while local competitors are found to imitate McDonald's employment schemes (Royle and Ortiz, 2009). This is also evident in the food retail sector, with Wal-Mart's employment practices being diffused across boundaries. Therefore, it is argued that 'Wal-Martization' is, similarly to 'McDonaldization', a strategic template known as 'low-road Americanization' and it is followed by the majority of global retailers within this international market (Royle, 2010, p.264). As Bair and Bernstein, (2006) suggest, Wal-Mart has displaced McDonalds from the 'throne' of the most influential company, and it is now more closely associated to US political, economic, and cultural power. It should be emphasized at this point that both 'McDonaldization' and 'Wal-Martization' represent similar models of the rationalization of the work process and emerge from an era of 'scientific' organization of work. However, they are not of course unproblematic as is discussed in the next chapter (Hales, 2001a). Nevertheless, as the following discussion shows, we should be cautious regarding the applicability of 'Wal-Martization' across different national contexts and in different institutional patterns. More discussion on these issues follows next.

2.1.1 Retail Internationalization: Global forces and national context

The question remains whether 'Wal-Martization' is applicable in every country. Scholars have endeavoured to understand and conceptualize retail internationalization (Alexander and Doherty, 2009). This thesis will not develop an extensive discussion regarding food-retail internationalization. What is interesting to recognize though is why food-retailers are interested in going global. Seth and Randall (2005) suggest that international expansion comes with benefits such as growth and economies of scale and stress that different retailers decide to adapt internationalization for different reasons. They make a division between US retailers who decide to go global due to their enormous success in the States, thus internationalization is concerned as a basic need, while Europeans, such as the French leader retailer – Carrefour, have expanded internationally to find opportunities to grow. This is supported by Alexander (1995) (in Moore and Fernie, 2004, p.13) who suggests that the internationalization process of British and European retailers was growth-oriented.

The literature presents different waves of expansion for food retailers, across the globe (Reardon and Gulati, 2008). These will not be analysed here. It is important to note though

that today a considerable growth pace for food retailers is expected to come, if not already coming, from emerging markets (Simms, 2007), such as Cyprus. This wave is described by Abraham (2009), as the “supermarket revolution”, and a strategic opportunity for food retailers. Food retailers use mergers and acquisitions as the major tactics to enter new regions (Simms, 2007; Bell et al, 2004; Arnold and Fernie, 2000; Xun, 2010; Burt et al, 2010).

Nevertheless, the issue of transferability and fit of a global retailer into a local environment is a concern for authors (Burt et al, 2005). Research attention has been given to whether retailers were accepted in local markets in their home-country form and whether they are using a united business style around the globe or they adjust themselves to the local characteristics. Kidger (2002) adopts Dicken’s (1998) view, suggesting that the world has not yet experienced a fully globalized economy as some industries are more globalized than others (in Debrah and Smith, 2002, p.171). Indeed, food-retailing today seems to follow a common pattern for the players investing in the sector, with ‘glocalization’ being the first choice for retailers in order to be able to compete effectively in the new regions they have entered. Besides as Aoyama and Schwarz argue, “successful retail globalization is synonymous with retail localization” (in Tilly, 2006, p.1808). Seth and Randall (2005, p.144) argue that food retailing today remains a national or even local industry, with 10% of the world market occupied by ‘transnational’ retailers, while similarly Burt et al (2010) note that retailing is a local affair with local demands. However, these arguments are not supported by Williams and Adam-Smith (2006) who believe that little evidence show the existence of ‘transnational’ companies because it is described as unstable and elusive (Debrah and Smith, 2002; 171).

Following the objectives of this research and the focus on the employment relationship, it is argued that different players in the market follow a different HR strategy in terms of transferring their HR practices across subsidiaries. Nevertheless, it is not long since food-retailers attempted to transfer their home-country practices to a different country, following the global typology, but have tasted the bitter failure. This would appear to be supported by Seth and Randall (2005) who note that, transfer of learning seems as a one-way road, where head office transfers knowledge to the subsidiaries based on the home wisdom.

This becomes clear when someone examines the Wal-Mart example and its endeavour to operate in Germany. Research indicates that Wal-Mart exhibits and promotes the image of

the traditional American-values company (Gerhard and Hahn, 2005; Seth and Randall, 2005), which has led to dramatic results to the company's international plans. Particularly, the American-Godzilla's (Arnold and Fernie, 2000) entry to Germany was a complete disaster costing lots of money and time to the organization (Burt and Sparks, 2001; Kolben, 2007). Wal-Mart's investment in Germany, as the first endeavour of the American giant to enter European Market, has faced major obstacles to success in the country. The German legislation such as the labour law, and plan restrictions, defused Wal-Mart's low road strategy. Additionally the issues with the suppliers inability to adapt to the centralized procedures of the company (Burt and Sparks, 2006, 2001) have forced Wal-Mart to withdraw its expansion as it lacked of "developing a trusted German customer culture" (Seth and Randall, 2005, p.32). Gerhard and Hahn (2005) stress that Wal-Mart's Customer Service culture was ill sorted to the Germanic Market, with only 8.7% reporting that Wal-Mart had friendly and helpful store assistants (p.19). Thus, Wal-Mart's attempt to taste 'Europeanism' using 'American ingredients' by transferring American practices to a significantly different context shows that the internationalization process is different across regions.

These failures served as an important learning curve for the company, as today it seems that Wal-Mart recognizes the uniqueness of different regions which requires a suitable local adoption, than a universal 'Wal-Mart dogma' (Kolben, 2007). This is highly evidenced to the case of ASDA. Matusitz and Leanza (2011) report that in the case of ASDA Wal-Mart abandoned its Bentonville-based corporate formula, and followed the principles of 'glocalization'. Burt and Sparks (2006a) characterize the acquisition of ASDA by Wal-Mart as a milestone of food-retail internationalization and maybe in the globalization of retailing in general. Kolben (2007;296) notes though that ASDA officials want to differentiate themselves from Wal-Mart, arguing that business run by local people and ASDA remains a British company, which follows British norms and expectations in order to succeed.

The internationalisation process for most retailers unavoidably includes divestment. There are many cases of food-retailers, beyond Wal-Mart, with high profile, struggling with international failures (Burt et al., 2004; 484). The 1970s were stigmatized by the failure of the Carrefour hypermarkets in the UK and the exit of K-Mart from Australia. The 1980s witnessed the failure of Carrefour to establish hypermarkets in the US (Tordjman 1988), and the sale of Woolworth stores in Mexico. Next, the 1990s saw K-Mart failure in

Czechoslovakia, while Ahold left China, and Tesco exited France. Finally, 2000s included the closure of many Marks and Spencer international stores (Burt et al., 2002) and the failures of Ahold (Burt et al., 2003, p.356). Understandably, retail internationalization is a risky, complex, and costly process with considerable failure rates for some of the European major retailers. Thus, it needs to be understood that each attempt for international expansion by food retailers requires a specific approach in each target-country (Kostova, 2008; 42). What this literature shows is that discussing of 'Wal-Martization' as a global identical trend across different countries, as Lichtenstein (2006) suggests, might be misleading. The principles of 'glocalization' and a 'best fit' strategic approach in global food retailers international expansion are affecting the way the employment relationship is structured in different markets. Besides, as Andersson et al. (2011, p.270) discuss, the national business systems can have a greater influence on the employment relationship than sector-specific influences, such as 'Wal-Martization'. Therefore, comparative research should consider the national context that the organizations are operating.

Smith and Meiskins conclude that the influences upon work within a particular country are the result of a three way interaction of the economic mode of production (system effects), the national and institutional contexts and patterns (societal effects) and the modernization strategies which are generated or diffused by the 'society-in-dominance' within the global economy at a particular period of time. The international experience of this thesis is sensitive to the regulatory frameworks of the UK and Cyprus, but at the same time adopts Tilly's (2007) and Lichtenstein's' (2006) discussion for the similar low road strategy followed by, at least, the Big4 global retailers. Besides, as Smith and Meiskins (1995, p.264) conclude the 'globalization of production is integrating organizations into logic's other than those given by national institutions and is facilitating more rapid learning and diffusion of new or 'best practice' from dominant societies'. The authors discuss the role of some dominant societies as standard-makers, such as the US and Japan, and at the same time recognize the limitations on one society adopting the standards set in another context. In a similar vein, this chapter continues with discussing the lean regime of grocery retailing and the work organization in the sector as driven by an international trend, recognizing the Americanization of work within retailing and the dominance of Wal-Mart as an influential dynamic within the food retail sector, as proposed by Lichtenstein's work. Yet, the similarities and differences between different countries and continents are recognized, in terms of how work is organized, suggesting that although the trend is

present within the sector, this does not mean that it is identical in every national context. As Smith and Meiskins (1995) again argue, the economy, and in this case a country, is not an ahistorical 'structure'. The sectoral and global forces, such as 'Wal-Martization', need to be seen as inextricably linked aspects of the national context, as the former cannot predetermine how the latter will look. "Rather, they still generate pressures and exigencies which must be worked out in actual societies" (Smith and Meiskins, 1995, p.252). Additionally, the same authors note that global forces must be understood as a complex and integrated system with the societies.

These arguments agree with Thompson and Newsome (2004) who open a discussion regarding the fourth wave of LPT, and suggest that there is not a single trend that is generalizable across all sectors or countries, noting that the state at a national level has a significant role to play. Nevertheless, as the latter authors report, "trends in product and capital markets are making the world a smaller place, and the extent of institutional distinctiveness is diminishing" (p.155). Therefore, 'Wal-Martization' cannot be explored and understood as an American trend that it has been divergent to the world; rather this force should be examined in relation to national forces and the national context it is applied upon. Finally, this trend is not associated with Wal-Mart per se, but more with what this trend represents for the sector and, following Lichtenstein's discussion, the similar patterns of employment, and the low road strategies across the food retail sector, which though, again, need to be explored in integration to the national system and the societal effects.

2.2 Low costs and low prices at any expense for employment

Burt and Sparks (2001) suggest that Wal-Mart always seeks for reduced prices and increasing sales through lower costs. The authors suggest that the American company encourages this trend within the sector and transforms the market, with the price becoming progressively more important for consumers. This leads to increasing customer demands for lower prices and drives the grocers' attempts to reduce costs. The international success of grocers stands on low costs, which are achieved through labour cost reduction and harsh buying policies within the supply chain (Bell et al., 2004; Burt and Sparks, 2001; Kolben, 2007; Neumark et al., 2008; Sparks, 2010; Tilly, 2007).

Indeed, food retailers are using abusive and aggressive buying practices on their suppliers, pushing them for lower costs. The Competition Commission (see Seth and Randall, 2005,

p.133) describes feelings of fear within the supplier-supermarkets relationship, with the former rarely verbalizing their discontent, whilst the latter holds excessive power and bullies the latter. The outcome of this bullying exercise is reflected on employment across the supply chain. This happens at two levels. The first level finds small suppliers unable to meet the cost requirements placed by the 'big box' enterprises, and therefore are driven out of business. At the second level, suppliers' endeavours to meet such cost requirements, in order to survive, have an impact on their labour practices, leading them to follow their buyers' unfair treatment over employment (Gereffi, 2004). This is supported by Johansson (2007, p.1463) who suggests that "Wal-Mart's, [and the Big food retailers'] labour standards is a problem for more than [their] employees". Food retailers affect the employment relationship in different stages of the supply chain, through the power exercised to their suppliers to cut costs, a phenomenon known as the 'Wal-Mart effect'. Lichtenstein (2006, p.5) notes that Wal-Mart 'has transformed thousands of its suppliers firms into quaking supplicants who scramble to cut their costs', whilst Xun (2010, p.470) notes that retailing relies significantly on human resources, and supermarkets impact on the entire supply chain and indirectly act as employers across an integrated supply chain.

Wal-Mart is also presented as indirect employer for its competitors' employees (Bair and Bernstein, 2006), an argument that leads us back to Lichtenstein's (2005) discussion for Wal-Mart being a prototype retailer, whose employment practices are diffused across the sector and are imitated by its competitors (Basker, 2005; Lichtenstein and Johansson, 2011). Overall, Bernhardt's (1999) argument is supported, reporting that Wal-Mart is successfully exercising pressure on the rest of the industry to follow the 'Wal-Mart Model'. Additionally, authors' arguments on the unfair labour practices in food retailing are well-supported (Askenazy et al., 2010; Ben-Ner et al., 1999; Featherstone, 2004; Johansson, 2007; Lichtenstein, 2007; Rosen, 2005).

Food retailers in general, have confronted attacks that are related to their relationship with suppliers, and employment issues, such as child labour practices, immigrant labour, ethics in employment, low wages, decline in labour demand across the supply chain, human rights violation and discrimination against women (Bair and Bernstein, 2006; Featherstone, 2004; Rosen, 2005). Additionally, anti-globalization and anti-Americanization movements generated arguments that highlight the erosion of employment relations, in the pursuit of lower costs and higher profits (Osborne, 2007; Seth and Randall, 2005). For example, authors point to Wal-Mart as an "American capitalistic monster" and one of those players

who diminished the employment relationship in the pursuit of profits (Besserman, 2008; Lichtenstein, 2005).

2.3 The food retail employment characteristics

Having recognized the political economy in the international market of food retailing, and the drivers for lower costs, this part discusses the employment regime and the work organization in food retailing, which is driven by the grocers' attempts to keep their (labour) costs low. Contemporary literature presents food retailing as one of the largest private employers (Burch and Lawrence, 2007; Carré and Tilly, 2009; Hastwell et al., 2013; Lynch et al., 2011; Tilly, 2006), and at the same time one of the most controversial employers in today's business world (Carré et al., 2010; Dimopoulos and Sayas, 2011). Grocers follow a mechanistic employment paradigm, using their employees as dehumanised parts of the machine operation (Johnson, 1998, p.1). Thus, although food retailers refer to their people as a crucial ingredient of their success recipe (Hastwell et al., 2013; Lichtenstein, 2007; Merkel et al., 2006; Tse, 1985), they fail to recognize the erroneous HR practices dominating the sector's employment schemes, flattering themselves as good employers. Therefore, it is argued here that the context of the food retail employment stands between two conflicting extremes. For instance, UFCW (2008), the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, accuses Tesco of having two faces; on one hand, the organization is celebrating its employment practices and on the other hand the union challenges Tesco's promotion of itself as a good employer.

Wal-Mart, and other retailers, have a reputation as bad employers that damage fair employment schemes. Besides, Wal-Mart's own research reports that people are becoming suspicious and untrusting of the giant retailer. The reaction to this has been a massive campaign by the retailer to strengthen its reputation as a good employer (Bianchi and Swinney, 2004). Nevertheless, when someone thinks of food retail employment, the first thing that comes to mind is 'big boxes' offering low status work, long working hours under stressful environment, and low level payments, often below the national minimum wage (Davis et al, 2009; Johansson, 2007). However, the food retail sector has not always been perceived as a bad employer. Food retailing used to be considered as a high status work, with good wages offered to employees (Davis et al, 2009). This has changed though when the 'big box' supermarkets went global. In this new era for food retailing, the majority of grocers, and always depending on the national context that they operate, are trapping their employees into low paid and unfair employment schemes (Askenazy et al., 2010;

Johansson, 2007; Lichtenstein, 2007), for the sake of lower costs and higher profits (Simms, 2007).

Yet, a question is raised. How do employees react to this schema? The retail history, and particularly the Wal-Mart history, is full of endeavours by workers and unions to promote workers' rights. Nevertheless, despite the campaigns and the heavy criticism over employment practices, the sector suffers from extremely high turnover and absenteeism rates (Lichtenstein, 2007). These are outcomes of the quantitative approach to the employment relationship (Broadbridge, 2002) and a result of the low-road strategy adopted by grocers (Bernhardt, 1999; Bianchi and Swinney, 2004).

2.3.1 Service work: Food retail espouses “McJob”

A great amount of research has acknowledged the importance of service work in the global economy. It has analysed and discussed the transformation from a manufacturing-based to a service-based society, and recognized the impact on the employment relationship (see Akehurst and Alexander, 1995; Korczynski, 2002; Leidner, 1993; Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996a). Bélanger and Edwards (2013a, p.433) note that service work occupies ‘the centre stage in empirical sociology of work studies’. Yet they discuss the need for extension of research, to account for the realities of service work, whilst Korczynski (2002) argues that the focus of analysis should be an attempt to understand the nature of the service work, rather an attempt to replicate what we know from the manufacturing literature. This thesis adopts the latter authors' arguments and suggests that further research is required within food retailing to understand the dynamics in this sector. Although some authors have previously discussed the patterns of work in retail (Akehurst and Alexander, 1995) and food retail in particular (Baret et al., 2000b; Freathy and Sparks, 1995), a fresh sociological analysis is required to understand these dynamics and the changes in service work organization within an era of austerity. This section stresses the argument that the McDonaldization thesis, a popular theme within the interactive service work research (Leidner, 1996, 1993; Ritzer, 1998; Royle, 2010), shares common features with the Wal-Martization trend.

Royle (2010) suggests that the McJob and, likewise, as argued in this thesis, the food retail job, is not as desirable and ‘made in heaven’ as the organizations try to portray it (Seth and Randall, 2005). In particular, both sectors suffer from high employee turnover rates, whilst low wages and limited benefits are provided, and there is limited upward mobility and career prospects. These facts are linked to the high proportion of hourly-paid and part-time

employees among the workforce of the two sectors (Carré et al., 2010, 2008; Carré and Tilly, 2009; Royle, 2010; Tilly, 1989).

Royle (2010) also discusses the routinization in fast-food industry, suggesting that it operates under Taylorist principles. This is evidenced through strict supervision and high level of control, through the state-of-art technology. Likewise, Carls (2009) describes retail work as a “neo-Taylorist” profession, within which the routinization of work, the lack of decision-making by employees, the recruitment of unskilled and cheaper labour, the control, and the direct supervision on workers, are embedded characteristics of the job (Bratton et.al, 2007; 53; Ben-Ner et al., 1999). Leidner (1993) in the same vein provides an analysis of the routinization of interactive service work, arguing that this is not a new phenomenon. Service providers were attracted to apply principles of routinization to benefit through lower labour costs and increased managerial control. Finally, Korczynski (2002, p.3–4) discusses the ‘McDonaldization’ thesis portraying the customer interaction as ‘fake, invasive, emotionally draining, demeaning highly routinized and alienating’ suggesting that the counterperson in McDonalds, similarly to the Wal-Mart cashier, are playing a well-defined role, following the guidelines developed by the organization, which leave limited space for individuality. These arguments suggest that the service sector, and in this case food retailing, espouse, at least to an extent, ‘Taylorism’. Although, some authors suggest that Taylorism was a ‘short-lived phenomenon’, grocers today espouse a neo-Tayloristic approach in organizing work (Bratton et al., 2007; Carls, 2009).

Additionally the role of the customer has been the interest of various authors (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010; Korczynski, 2013, 2002; Lopez, 2010). Indeed, authors have extensively discussed the differentiation of the service work to manufacturing and highlighted the crucial role of the customer in the labour process. As Korczynski (2002, p.12) notes, the globalization of service has intensified competition, putting the customer in the centre of attention. Belanger and Edwards (2013a) take for granted the involvement of the customer within the triangle of power in the employment relationship and emphasize their influence, whilst others have similarly discussed the role of the customer within the labour process and the impact on the employment relationship (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010, 2005; Korczynski, 2013; Korczynski and Evans, 2013; Lopez, 2010). This thesis will not discuss in detail the customer-employee-employer triangle. However, it is important to note that, given the global intensive competition and the power of the customer, a great debate exists in the literature regarding where the competition lies. Is it a competition on price or service

quality? Although the answer seems simple, suggesting that the organizations have to compete at the two levels *simultaneously* (Korczynski, 2002, p.14 emphasis original), this generates pressures and shapes the changes in the employment relationship (Katz, 1996, p.16).

All the arguments above suggest that interactive service work is driven by the rules of ‘McDonalization’ and ‘Wal-Martization’. These arguments are not associated with the two corporations per se, but to the patterns of employment that these two organizations have developed and diffused across the service sector. It is crucial to recognize that these trends have generated significant changes in the business world. Wal-Mart has created the new food retail environment and brought to life a low-road strategy in organizing work. As Adams (2006) reports, Wal-Mart has created the new food retail shop floor, which has become emblematic for American workers. Yet the focus is not only on one employer or a corporation, such as Wal-Mart, no matter how large or powerful, but to the extent that its practices are diffused in the sector in the post-Fordist era of capitalism. Thus, following Arnold and Fernie’s (2000) argument that Wal-Mart wants to be the McDonalds of retail and Tilly’s (2006, p.1807) similar suggestion that “Wal-Mart...seems to be the ideal agent for McDonaldizing retail...worldwide”, it is argued that grocers organize work following Taylorist principles and shape the new service terrain. The Americanization of the employment relationship is evident, with retailers focusing on lower labour costs, lower prices, and higher service quality. Hence, the leaner organization of work and the low road strategy are evident in food retailing. Andersson et al. (2011) question the wider argument in the literature, which describes retail as a low road sector. The authors argue that although the nature of retail cannot be fully described as ‘high road’, in the Swedish context retail employment cannot be accurately characterized as ‘low road’. Indeed, it should be recognized that in different national contexts, the degree to which retail can be described as either high or low road might vary. Low road strategy is part of food retailing, within which though both national and institutional exemptions are present.

2.3.2 The ‘Low-road’ strategy

Royle and Ortiz (2009), exploring the parameters of employment relations in MNCs illustrate the example of McDonalds, which has created a ‘best practice’ dominance effect, resulting to a low-road case in its employment relations. A large volume of published studies describes the adoption of the similar low-road strategy by global food retailers (Appelbaum et al., 2005; Bernhardt, 1999; Carré et al., 2010; Carré and Tilly, 2009;

Johansson, 2007; Klaveren, 2010). Bianchi and Swinney (2004, p.8) report: “Wal-Mart...is undeniably one of the premier low-road firms operating in the US and world today”

The pursuit of the low road strategy is emerging through new opportunities, fashioned by the global economy and new technology. Particularly, service sectors, including food retailing, take the low road strategy to strive against the domestic and global competition by reducing costs, and particularly labour costs (Bernhardt, 1999; Bianchi and Swinney, 2004). This becomes possible through cuts in labour costs such as training, and wages. Moreover, tactics such as discouragement of employee initiatives, limited opportunities for upward mobility and discouragement for employees to exercise their rights through anti-union practices, are characteristics of the low-road labour strategies (Appelbaum et al., 2005; Bernhardt, 1999; Carré et al., 2010; Johansson, 2007; Tilly, 2007). Next, the chapter analyses the characteristics of the low-road strategy adopted by food retailers in the pursuit of lower labour costs, recognizing at the same time the national and institutional variations in the adoption of the low road strategy by food retailers.

2.3.2.1 Low wages: The norm

A considerable amount of literature has argued that the the food retail sector is dominated by low wages for non-managerial employees (Carré et al., 2005). Various studies, such as Carré and Tilly’s, (2009), whose research is devoted to the job quality within retailing, describe supermarkets as the biggest low-wage industry (Carré et al., 2010, 2008, 2005; Tilly, 2006, 1989). Others have similarly explored this area and almost universally accepted the existence of extremely low-wages within food retailing (Appelbaum et al., 2005; Askenazy et al., 2010; Ben-Ner et al., 1999; Budd and McCall, 2001; Burt et al., 2010; Klaveren, 2010; Klaveren and Voss-dahm, 2011). Blythman (2005, p.131) notes, ‘Low pay is endemic in the world of supermarkets’, whilst Carré et al. (2005) report that this trend has been getting worse throughout the decades, especially for low-skilled workers, and this is driven by the internationalization of retail.

Nevertheless, supporters of supermarkets do not accept the term low wages. Instead, they refer to good jobs with fair wages that provide high service quality to the lowest price, and achieve increased buying power for their customers (Vedder and Cox, 2006). Bernhardt (1999) reports that staff should be able to provide fast service and cheap products to the customer, whereas retailers suggest that ‘cheap help’ is compulsory for higher competitiveness, which, from a business point of view, legitimates the provision of low

wages in order to achieve reduced labour costs (Johansson and Coggins, 2002; Lichtenstein, 2007).

Retail is considered as an extremely labour-intensive industry (Carré and Tilly, 2009; Gadrey and Jany-Catrice, 2000; Merkel et al., 2006). Hence, labour cost affects significantly the financial results and the bottom-line (Lichtenstein, 2007). This is common in the service industry and particularly the retail sector. Authors have extensively argued that labour costs are affecting the profits. For example, Freathy and Sparks (1995) argue that food retailing is a highly competitive and labour intensive industry, and since labour is the second largest cost after merchandising, the management of labour costs is a strategic priority. Adams (2006) similarly argues that the ability for food retailers to control labour costs is the indispensable and the most important factor for their growth. Additionally, Freathy and Sparks (1995) found that food retailers have turned individual stores into cost centres, within which store managers are responsible to manage budgets and meet targets set by the Head Office. Therefore, through the centralization of decisions and the devolvement of targets, organizations attempt to control labour costs. Freathy and Sparks (1995) conclude that retailing is generally considered as a low status and low pay sector. Finally, Rosen (2006) suggests that the culture of food retailing is a result of a policy that is designed to save pennies, and this is reflected in the low wages and the limited benefits offered to shop floor workers. Retailers are constructing their penny-saving and low price strategy through lower labour costs. Johansson and Lichtenstein (2011, p.3) report that the retail revolution, and the embedded low wages have brought cheap products, but at the same time have engendered insecurity and anxiety for millions of workers within the sector.

Wal-Mart and/or other discounters are not the only organizations who adopt a low-road labour strategy and provide low compensations. This is a wider norm within food retailing (Carré et al., 2005). Carré et al. (2010) conducted research in the USA and five European countries and examined different elements of the low-road strategy in this sector, including payment and benefits. The authors find that retail is considered as a low-wage sector in all the countries explored, whereas Appelbaum (2010) similarly finds that a significant number of retail workers are paid below the national low-wage line. For instance, 49% of retail workers in the UK are low wage workers, while retail workers in France and Denmark hold the lowest percentage of low wages. Blythman (2005) notes that in 2003, Tesco, Marks and Spencer, and Morrison's were three of the worst paying employers in the

UK, reporting that supermarket workers in the UK need to work 94 hours per week to reach the average British wage. Similar and more recent research of the Fair Pay Network in 2012 reports that the big four UK supermarkets, Asda, Tesco, Sainsbury's and Morrison's fail to pay their employees a living wage, and suggests that they are paid wages so low that it keeps them in poverty. As the report argues though, the grocers are not doing anything unlawful, but rather are paying their workers in compliance to the NMW. Yet, as the report shows, many of the low-paid supermarket workers face major financial problems as the majority of the participants, who were women, earned 86% less than the living wage and a wage rate that would keep them out of poverty (see Williams, 2014, pp. 240–241). These findings agree with other authors' suggestion that low pay is embedded in the work organization of food retailing. Although the wage levels might vary between grocers, and countries, see for example the case of Sweden (Andersson et al., 2011), the argument is comprehensive, suggesting that supermarket workers are low paid.

For example, although it is reported, that Aldi is paying above the minimum wage (The Grocer, 2005/10/8), as well as that living wage campaigns have targeted the 'Big four' grocers in the UK, such as Tesco and Sainsbury's (The Independent, 2014/07/24; Williams, 2014), low pay has continued to increase in recent years in the UK, especially for workers that are employed in hospitality and retail (Whittaker and Hurrell, 2013). In fact, 29% of all low paid workers in the UK are employed in retail (Plunkett and Hurrell, 2013).

Additionally Askenazy et al. (2010), comparing food retail work in United States and France, find that French cashiers are better paid than their counterparts in the USA. Yet, Carré and Tilly (2009, p.16) report that front-line employees in food retailing earn only the 57% of the average pay across all private industries. Authors have attempted to explain the difference between the payment levels among different countries (Appelbaum, 2010; Carré et al., 2010). Interestingly, research shows that this difference is related to National Institutions and their impact on labour. For instance, although food retailing is a sector within which trade unions have limited power (Johansson and Coggins, 2002; Lichtenstein, 2008; Tilly, 2007), in Denmark and Sweden (Andersson, et al. 2011) it seems that trade unions have some influence over employment and, therefore, have managed to keep wages higher, in comparison to other countries (Appelbaum, 2010; Carré et al., 2008). On the other hand, in France, the lower level of low-income for retail workers is not a result of high union intensity, but an outcome of the higher level of the national minimum wage, which puts low-income workers in better position than the rest of their European

counterparts (Appelbaum, 2010). Additionally, the comparison between the EU and the United States, shows that the workforce within the EU boundaries receive fairer compensation than Americans, due to the EU guidelines and regulations (Appelbaum, 2010; Carré et al., 2010). Overall, it is well understood that, as Carre and Tilly (2010b) conclude, low-wage workers aspirations for improvements in wages and working conditions depend more on national institutions rather than on employers' practices. What it is important to note is that although wage levels vary between organizations and national contexts, the food retail workers are one of the lowest paid occupations in the service economy.

Another argument suggests that although payment might be above the legal minimum wage in some countries, employees are not allowed to work sufficient hours to earn a living wage (UFCW, 2008), whilst in some cases they are not allowed to work overtime. This is a common practice found particularly in Wal-Mart (Johansson, 2007). But then again, even if they work overtime due to under-staffing, they do not get premium for those working hours (Appelbaum, 2010; Lichtenstein, 2007, 2005). Thus, the argument suggesting that employees in food retailing are not receiving a decent income from their job, a fact that drives them and their families into financial struggles, is well supported in research (Wood and Burchell, 2014). Therefore, workers in supermarkets are forced in part-time work, and consequently seek for extra jobs in order to make a living. Finally, Carre and Tilly (2008) find that wages in food retailing start from a low level and have limited progress. This is happening due to the pay difference between part-time and full-time workers, as full-time jobs are only available to employees beyond entry-level positions. Hence, the gap between part-timers and full-timers, in combination with the limited available full-time jobs in the industry, is a significant factor that keeps wages to the bottom.

2.3.2.2 Part-time and female work

A large and growing body of literature has investigated and showed that food retailers are using part-time employees to cover their labour needs (see Akehurst and Alexander, 1995; Baret et al., 2000b). Thus, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the impact of part time employment in supermarkets. As already mentioned, retailers seek to reduce labour costs and this is mainly orchestrated through the structure of a part-time workforce Part-time jobs have dominated the sector since the 1970s, although there are differences in national contexts (Carre ad Tilly, 2010, Andersson et al., 2011).This was a strategy

principally adopted by employers to gain the cost-cutting advantages of part-time employment schemes (Tilly, 1989).

Carre and Tilly (2010) report that US retailers have introduced part-time employment for three main purposes. Firstly, to match staffing to the customer flow in the stores, to cover weekend shifts and finally, to take advantage of the lower hours benefits offered to part-time workers. Similar findings were reported in Baret et al.'s (2000b) volume. This collection brings together an extensive cross-national discussion on working time and flexible working within food retailing. Similar to Carre and Tilly (2010), the latter authors find that part-time and flexible working schemes were adopted by grocers, in all countries examined, to adjust staffing levels to customer flows in the store and to reduce the labour costs. Although these authors identified slight differences across the countries, part-time and flexible work was particularly applicable for jobs that involved direct interaction with the customer. This is a common theme emerging through the volume (see Baret et al., 2000b). Similarly, Williams (2014, p.251), reporting on Grimshaw and Rubery's (2010) findings, notes that flexible working arrangements, such as flexi-time, zero-hour contracts and part-time work, have grown significantly in retail. He suggests that this is because it suits employers in terms of cost savings, it enables them to manage labour in an efficient way, it helps them to operate outside the conventional 9-5 working day without having to pay for overtime, and, finally, it allows them to respond to variations in customer demands.

Part-time employment can satisfy both employers' and employees' demand for flexibility (Tilly, 1989). Penn (1995) (in Harris et al., 2007, p.494) supports the argument that part-time work offers to employers the elasticity to respond to fluctuating customer demand through longer opening hours, and to control costs. However, it also meets the need of those employees who seek to balance between work and family commitments. Williams (2014) reports that flexible working arrangements and part-time work are seen as desirable because they enable employees, and particularly female employees, who are the majority of workers in food retailing, to combine paid employment with unpaid household labour (p.251). Lichtenstein (2004) states that, the idea of temporary employment and the weak relationship with the employer is the norm today in the food retail industry. Likewise, Zeytinoglu et al., (2004, p.519) report that part-time work was always a practice used in retail and existed before the typical 'nine to five' work. Nevertheless, it is also argued that retail used to be a sector characterized by full-time jobs, a scheme that has changed today, with part-time work and short hour jobs becoming the norm across the globe (Tilly, 1989;

Zeytinoglu et al., 2004). Yet, Carre et al's (2010) cross-national research presents common features and differences among US and EU working schedules, as well as among the European countries explored. The authors found that in all the countries "retail workforce is increasingly part-time" (p.221). Moreover, it is reported that part-time workforce in food retailing is larger than the retail average, with high concentration of part-time women within the sector in all the six countries explored. It is also found that part-time workforce is dominated by women and younger workers. These findings support the argument for employees seeking for flexibility in their work, and balance with life outside the workplace. To be more specific, the authors state that women, especially those with family commitments, as well as young students, seek for flexibility and predictability to their working schedule (Appelbaum, 2010; Carré et al., 2010; Goode and Simon, 1994). Hence, arguably, the exit options developed by retailers were driven by this demand of flexibility (Carré et al., 2008; 2010).

Nevertheless, the result of that is the domination of low-wage and part-time work in the sector. For instance, in Germany, the option of the 'mini job', which is described as a short-hour and part-time job, paid below the collectively bargained level. Similarly, in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK research revealed a lower statutory wage scale for younger workers. Specifically in the UK, as well as in the Netherlands, the scheme of youth subminimum wage has generated incentives for employers to hire very young employees. The wage level of a fifteen-year-old is 62% of the adult minimum wage in the UK and 35 % in the Netherlands. Thus, the retailers, especially in Netherlands, due to the price war pressures and strong competition, have replaced adult female workers with young students, making the organization of work and staffing leaner. On the contrary, in France there seems to be a lack of availability of teenagers in the selection pool, due to the long hours spent in school. Thus, unlike the UK, French retailers are facing limitations in their ability to offer part-time employment (Carré and Tilly, 2010). This limitation explains the lower percentage of part-time workers in France, along with Sweden, where full time jobs are the norm in retail (Andersson et al., 2011) and surprisingly, the United States (Appelbaum, 2010). However, in other research, US grocers are presented to heavily employing part-timers, as a tool to manage cost. Therefore, women with children, and high school students, are those who work on the front-line in the US supermarkets, a trend less prevalent in France (Askenazy et al., 2010; Carré and Tilly, 2010), but still a scheme that is found in many EU countries.

In addition, despite the claims that part time work offers flexibility to work-life balance for working mothers and students, some disadvantages are evident in research for part-time workers. For example, Wood and Burchell (2014) find that the schedule insecurity generates tangible impacts for employees, such as financial instability, inability to plan finances, reduced ability to take additional jobs, reduced ability to take educational and training programs, and reduced ability to fulfil child caring responsibilities. Similarly, Williams (2014) report four main problems that are related to part time and flexible working arrangements. Particularly, Williams suggests that although such arrangements are available in theory, it does not mean that the workers are using them in practice. He also refers to the gender (in)equality that arises from their use, suggesting that those who undertake them are in majority women working in low paid and in low-skilled sectors, such as food retail. The third problem presented concerns the ‘dual logic’ of such arrangements, stressing the question: to what extent can these arrangements meet both employers’ and employees’ needs (Messenger, 2011 in Williams, 2014, p.253). Williams (2014) also suggests that there is often a mismatch between organizational demands for flexibility and employees’ demands for flexibility and potentially for work-life balance. As Grimshaw and Rubery (2010, p.370) report, part-time jobs are ‘organized and designed to maximize employer flexibility, to meet fluctuations in customer demand or to provide cover for sickness and holidays’. Understandably, there is a high potential for conflict between the scope of the flexibility arrangements usage by employers and employees (in Williams, 2014, p.253).

2.3.2.3 Technology, control, deskilling and lower costs

Mason and Osborne (2008) argue that retail workers are less qualified than the average employee in the UK. This is widely accepted by authors who characterize [food] retailing as a low skill sector that does not require educational qualifications or previous experience (Appelbaum, 2010; Appelbaum et al., 2005; Carré et al., 2008; Carré and Tilly, 2009; Davis et al., 2009; Price, 2011). Nevertheless, other authors suggest that skills such as oral communication, interaction with others, personal presentation, reliability, strong work ethic, and motivation are crucial for providing good customer service, an indispensable principle of a supermarket and its operation (Hastwell et al., 2013).

Two main themes are presented in the literature. The first argument indicates that the introduction of state-of-art technology leads to deskilling for supermarket employees (Price, 2011), and reduces the number of staff required for the business operation (Tolich

and Briar, 1999). On the contrary some authors support that technology makes lower paid and low skilled workers more productive (Budd and McCall, 2001).

Tilly (1989) supports that technological changes in food retailing have allowed the increase of part-time employment in the stores, and simultaneously shrunk the amount of full-time jobs. The introduction of self-service checkouts, scanners and computerized ordering, led to labour cost reduction, as less employees are present on the shop floor (Ben-Ner et al., 1999). Therefore, it is well understood that the use of technology in the industry has a significant impact on work organization. Bernhardt (1999) presents the various effects of the technological advancements in retail, arguing though that it has not resulted in an upgrade of the (food) retail job, as technology possibly can do the job. Another argument supports that the customers are those who actually do the job. The increase of self-service allocates the job to the customer and involves the latter in the labour process, reducing the workforce (Korczynski, 2002), and suggests fewer skills for those remaining on the shop floor as the labour process is standardized, in a general attempt to reduce labour costs (Price, 2011). Therefore, technology drives the lean retailing practices for grocers.

Price (2011) also stresses that technology's most striking effect is the elimination of jobs. The automatization of work leads to fewer workers necessary to complete a task (Ben-Ner et al., 1999). Additionally, automatization and computerization of everyday jobs have resulted in fewer skills. Consequently the less skilled workforce is being paid less as Vedder and Cox (2006) suggest. Even though someone could expect that new technologies would increase the skill requirements for workers, leading employers to recruit, train and retain a high skilled workforce (Ben-Ner et al., 1999), this is only evidenced for managerial positions. Specifically, it is argued that the technological advancements have increased skill levels for store managers, but not for checkout employees (Price, 2011, p.89). In fact, there is little evidence for increased training and recruitment associated with high technology for front-line employees (Bernhardt, 1999). Alternatively, training for front-line staff is short but effective, as Carre and Tilly (2009) suggest, whilst the authors make a distinction between six different countries concerning the training delivered to front-line employees (Carré et al., 2010). Particularly, checkout employees receive on-the-job training, although differentiations among different nations are evidenced. For instance, in the UK and the US there is an absence of vocational training (Appelbaum et al., 2005), unlike other countries such as France and Germany (Carré et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the

supermarket job is still a monotonous repetition of simple tasks (Bernhardt, 1999; Carré and Tilly, 2009).

Retailers have chosen to invest more in technology, to secure lower costs and to monitor employees and the flow of consumption. The advanced technology in the sector is the main path for employers to control the employment relationship and apply 'technical control' (Edwards, 1979). According to the Edwards, 'Technical control' aims to minimize the problem of transforming labour power into labour, as well as, to maximize the possibilities to achieve efficiencies. This is predominant in contemporary economy and the food retail sector where technology is the main and core lever of control. For example, Ritzer (1998) and his famous writings on "McDonaldization" clearly suggests that the labour process in such environments is mainly controlled through non-human technologies as this is one of the basic principles of this trend. Hence, similar to Edwards (1979), Ritzer (1998) refers to the development of a structural control, through technology and mechanistic levers of control. This gives weight to Braverman's discussion of deskilling and dehumanization of work. Ritzer (1998) suggests that employees who work within McDonalized systems, such as food retailing, tend to limit their work into robot-like actions and scripted interactions.

Finally, Broadbridge's (2002) argument should be stressed, suggesting that the technological advancements within retail leads to the adoption of a quantitative approach to the management of employment, which leads to decreased employee well-being and increased absenteeism and turnover rates.

2.3.2.4 Unions: keep out?

Despite the fact, that unionism has managed to gain some advantages for workers in France, Denmark (Carre et al, 2010) as well as Sweden (Andersson et al. (2011), unions are still weak against giant retailers such as Wal-Mart in the United States. Nonetheless, Johansson (2007) suggests that supermarket employment is distinguished from the rest of the retail industry through the high level of union representation for workers in the industry. Yet, this is only partly accepted, as others find that union density varies across countries (Johansson and Coggins, 2002; Kolben, 2007; Tilly, 2006). Kainer (1998) argues that although supermarkets are facing a shift towards a post-Fordism economy, unions are still keener to protect full-time employees' rights, and often neglect the part-time employees' pay equity. Kainer (1998) concludes that unions surprisingly support a shrinking group of employees, overlooking the increasing number of part-timers in the industry. Nevertheless, as Lynch et al. (2011) argue, part-timers often refuse to unionize.

The authors compare the level of unionism in retailing between UK and Australia, noting that the structure of the labour within the industry, unsurprisingly leads to low union density. Specifically, the low road strategy adopted by retailers, in an endeavour keep cost low, and the increasing flexibility in the labour structure, make unions unable to protect workers' rights. For instance, the significant proportion of part-time workers finds unions unable to attract them to join them, as this group of employees is less likely to become a union member (Lynch et al., 2011). Charlwood (2002) also concludes that employees prefer to remain union-free in the case that they believe that their membership will lead to worse working conditions. Hence, arguably, part-time workers might experience an environment of fear, if they try to organize in unions.

This is emerging from the anti-union practices exercised by retailers. Carre et al. (2010) report a case in France, where employees were threatened with job loss if they joined a syndicalist institution. Similar practices are also presented by US retailers, with Wal-Mart being the major 'enemy' for unionism in the country. The organization still today remains union-free, at least within the USA borders (Lichtenstein, 2009; Lichtenstein and Johansson, 2011). As Kolben (2007) finds, Wal-Mart is not anymore diffusing its American model labour practices to its subsidiaries, but instead it adapts itself to local regulations, including the pressure by institutions, such as unions, and allows the collective organization of its workforce. Thus, Wal-Mart's subsidiary branches, in the UK for example, allow their workers to participate in unionism (Matusitz and Leanza, 2011). Nevertheless, Tilly (2007) argues that in regions where unionization is a choice made by the worker, Wal-Mart is found to resist. In countries where labour regulations and laws exist, regarding the union organization, Wal-Mart has suffered from slow growth. Such an example is Germany, where Wal-Mart faced difficulties to adjust to local labour regulations with major monetary costs and influence on the organization's reputation.

A great discussion exists in literature, concerning Wal-Mart's strategy to fight unions (Bair and Bernstein, 2006; Kolben, 2007; Lichtenstein, 2008). Nevertheless, Wal-Mart is not the only organization who stands against unionism. Kolben (2007) argues that in United States unionization is not the norm, because of the decentralized system of industrial relations. Nevertheless, workers who seek to organize in unions are discriminated against that effort. Moreover, the author states that Wal-Mart's opposition to unions is something that is essential in its culture, as this was developed by Sam Walton, with the organization having "zero tolerance to union activity among its employees" (Kolber, 2007, p.285). Lichtenstein

(2008, p.1462) suggests that Wal-Mart has successfully fought unionization and this is evidenced through the historical analysis presented by the author. Maybe the most striking incidences presented in literature is the closure of stores in order to prevent the union organization (Bair and Bernstein, 2006; Kolben, 2007). Moreover, the employees have experienced bullying from the organization, which has threatened to withdraw their limited benefits, or even their job, if they joined a union. Additionally, Wal-Mart has developed an anti-union network with systems such as “union hotline” and “Union Probability Index” trying to act proactively and discourage union organization (Johansson, 2007). It should be noted that employees are familiar with such tactics from their early days in the organization, as they are trained in anti-unionism, using videos and lectures in an endeavour by managers to convince them that they do not need unions. Nevertheless, as Williams (2014, p.273) notes, although Wal-Mart “has successfully managed to avoid recognizing unions in its US stores, [it] was affected by strikes, protests and walk-outs by many of its workers during 2012”. Nevertheless, the employee handbook clearly states, “we are not anti-union; we are pro-Associate”. In addition, executives stated, “every Associate can speak for himself or herself without having to pay hard-earned money to a union in order to be heard and have issues resolved”. This might seem surprising considering the criticism of Wal-Mart’s abusive labour tactics and the low wages leading employees living below the poverty line (Kolben, 2011; 286).

Once again, Lichtenstein (2008) presents Wal-Mart as the organization whose employment practices are followed by others in the industry. Specifically, Lichtenstein suggests that the absence of collective bargaining and employees’ voice in Wal-Mart, leads others to espouse anti-union approaches, particularly in the USA but not necessarily in Europe. For example, UFCW (2008), the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, accuses Tesco in the USA of fighting unions, unlike the British Tesco (Wilton, 2011). Yet, the union intensity varies among the organizations. Blythman (2005, p.129) argues that Tesco in the UK encourages union membership. The organization is today in partnership with the retail workers union USDAW and this is the biggest private sector collective bargaining agreement in the UK, and one of the biggest in Europe, which regulates issues within the employment relationship such as pay structures, attendance, disciplines and work-life balance (Engage for success, 2012). As Wilton (2011, p.149) notes, this agreement was driven by the desire to mend the existing antagonistic employee relations and to generate a two-way communication. Indeed, the partnership broadened the role of the union to include informal consultation and ongoing dialogue on a wide range of issues.

Nevertheless, as Williams (2014, p.196) notes, ‘the partnership agenda ‘is to a large extent a reflection of trade union weakness’ and in the case of Tesco, ‘the union was concerned that the company was contemplating derecognition’, while its influence is limited. Conversely, in Asda, which is owned by Wal-Mart, the managers do not refer to the words ‘trade union’. This should not be a surprise because as Kolben (2007) suggests, Wal-Mart’s most argumentative relations with unions have occurred in the UK. Therefore, to conclude, although unions were somewhat successful in organizing employees in the sector, they still seem to be weaker than the supermarket giants (Johansson and Coggins, 2002; Lynch et al., 2011; Tilly, 2007). As Baccaro (2008; p.28) finds: “Trade unionism currently operates under more stringent structural constraints than in the past” and this is partly the result of globalization. Nonetheless, it is not suggested that food retail is universally fighting unionism, but it is argued that employees are less keen to participate in such institutions (Lynch et al. 2011).

To sum up, the low union density effect combined with the low wages found in the majority of the industry lead in lower job quality. Indeed, in all the countries examined by Carre et al. (2010), retail workers were presented as vulnerable and this combined with the relaxation of regulations, retailers have the power and the ability to dispute organized actions by institutions that aim to protect employees. Thus, accepting Charlwood’s (2002) conclusion that employees want to unionize when they feel dissatisfied, believing that a union would improve their working experience, but also accepting that supermarket is an industry with low union density it is argued that the employee formal voice is limited within the sector. Hence, it is worth investigating how employees verbalize their struggle towards the organization of work. More discussion on these issues follows in the next chapter, where attendance at work is examined as a manifestation of industrial conflict.

2.4 The regulatory frameworks and the food retail sector in the UK and Cyprus

The chapter so far has discussed the food retail sector’s political economy. It has introduced and explained the ‘Wal-Martization’ trend, as the dynamic that shapes the work organization in food retailing, and has described the employment characteristics within this sector. Although the existing research has recognized the social and economic dynamics, as well as the employment characteristics in grocery retailing, this research, as it was specified earlier, provides an international comparative analysis, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the problematic of this research within this international sector.

Geppert et al. (2014) recognize the internationalization of food retailing and report the increasing influence of the multinational food retailers on the employment relationship and the working conditions in European societies. The authors also support, to an extent, the dominance of the Wal-Mart effect in the sector, which involves the global spread of low wage and low skill employment with fragmented working hours. Following these arguments, this research provides a comparison between the dominant UK food retail market in Europe, with the developing grocery retail market of Cyprus. The thesis extends the existing comparative research on food retail employment issues (Baret et al., 2000b; Carré et al., 2010; Carré and Tilly, 2010; Geppert et al., 2014), involving new international markets in the discussion, such as Cyprus. Therefore, at this point, it is important to contextualize the employment regulations and the food retail sector dynamics in the two countries that are compared in this thesis (UK and Cyprus), in order to establish the terrain within which this research takes place. This section provides a brief discussion regarding the regulatory employment frameworks in the UK and Cyprus, and describes the sector's dynamics in each country.

2.4.1 The UK regulatory framework and the UK food retail sector

A significant amount of research has described the industrial relations profile within the UK and has discussed the changing British industrial relations system (see Kessler and Bayliss, 1998; Marchington et al., 2011; Williams and Adam-Smith, 2010). This section does not attempt a historical review of the industrial relations in Britain, or a review of the theoretical developments in Industrial Relations (IR) research. Rather it will present some key points in the development of the contemporary IR environment in the UK. As Marchington et al. (2011) conclude the British IR system has undergone substantial changes over the last 30 years. These authors highlight the reduction in union density, after a long period of significant growth and high political and industrial power for UK trade unions. However, in the late 1970s, the election of the Thatcher government, which was based on an anti-union and neo-liberal platform, was a catalyst for change (Gamwell, 2014), in an attempt to reverse the economic decline (Marchington et al., 2011). The Tory agenda was explicitly to challenge trade union influence and political power culminating in the infamous industrial actions of 1984 – 1985. Thatcher's policies broke trade union influence and paved the way for neo-liberal capitalism. Indeed, some have characterised this point in British history as the shift from a voluntarist to a neo-liberal interventionist state (Fairbrother, 2002 in Marchington et al., 2011, p.45).

After this period the British IR system has been fundamentally reformed by legislation that was characterised by labour market de-regulation and attempts to foster a competitive 'enterprise culture'. These reforms, combined with the broader macro-economic trends in the labour market, had significant effects on British industrial relations (Marchington et al., 2011). The following Conservative and New Labour Governments maintained the fundamental framework of Thatcherism (Marchington et al., 2011), although new legislation was also enacted. Key changes include the introduction of a national minimum wage in 1999 and the Blair Government's opt-in to the Maastricht EU Social Protocol, which has strengthened statutory employment rights, such as the working time regulations and the anti-discrimination legislation, family friendly policies and information and consultation, embracing the UK's European membership (Gamwell, 2014; Marchington et al., 2011; Smith and Morton, 2006). Debates are continue as to the New Labour's intent of a legislative programme, regarding the employment relationship, which constituted a slight shift towards employees' interests and the juridification in the regulation of minimum employment standards, distinguishing the New Labour from its Conservative predecessors (Marchington et al., 2011; Williams and Adam-Smith, 2010).

Nevertheless, the UK IR remains a neo-liberal system, and despite the increased juridification, there is still an absence of a strong and centrally regulated IR system (Marchington et al., 2011). The IR system in the UK is traditionally characterised by voluntary relations between the social partners, with a minimal level of interference from the state. (Gamwell, 2014). A wider neo-liberal approach to the employment relationship is evidenced in the system, in which employers have been allowed to pursue either a low-road approach of cost-minimisation, or a high-road approach of high-commitment. Therefore, as Marchington et al. (2011, p.59) conclude, 'despite the picture of calm that appears to be portrayed by low levels of industrial action, it is also abundantly clear that employment relations in Britain continue to be characterized by tensions and contradictions'.

Undeniably the food retail sector in the UK is following a low road strategy, where the supermarkets are involved in an aggressive price war. There has been a great discussion about the increasing price competition in the sector by the 'Big four' UK supermarkets (Seth and Randall, 2001), which brings the management of labour costs to the forefront. Therefore, the 'Wal-Mart effect' is one of the drivers of the work organization in this

market, which is based on low wages, part-time work, anti-union practices and low union density, deskilling and managerial control.

This section will not repeat these arguments. However, it is important to recognize that these employment characteristics might vary between the organizations, whereas it should also be noted that not all food retailers follow a low road strategy in this market. For example, a high road, high commitment strategy is followed by Marks and Spencer and Waitrose. Some have shown interest in the differentiation corporate strategy of these retailers, the 'Marks and Spencer way' and the 'Employee ownership model' of John Lewis and Waitrose, suggesting that these partnership models are more resilient. Specifically they appear to have a lower risk of business failure, even during the recession when they have outperformed the market and demonstrated higher rates of sales growth and job creation. (Bevan, 2001; Lampel et al., 2012; Sieff, 1991). Indeed as a recent report shows, Waitrose, for example, increased its market share from 0,3% to 5,2%. At the same time the German discounters Aldi and Lidl also continue to grow, although to a slower pace (see BBC/8 April 2014, Kantar Worldpanel). Yet, as IGD (2014) reports, the Hypermarkets and the 'Big four' retailers are still dominating the UK market, while the grocery retailing remains, in the main, a low cost industry. Recent articles discuss the decreasing sales of the 'Big four' grocers in the UK and their actions to the falling sales and profit warnings. For example, Tesco and Morrisons have announced the closure of unprofitable stores, whereas the former also announced the stoppage of its salary-linked pension scheme (CIPD, 2015). Understandably, the UK grocery retail market is not a static environment. Although, it is dominated by a few grocers, the competition and external dynamics are constantly changing and have impact on the grocers' ability to survive within this changing environment.

The question that needs to be raised at this point is what the impact on employment is. Banks et al. (2014) report that the UK services industries account for the 79% of the UK economy in 2013 compared with 46% in 1948. The food retail sector is one of the biggest private employers in services, with only the 'Big four' grocers employing more than 950,000 people. Therefore, a significant percentage of the working population is affected by the employment practices of the 'Big four' retailers and their low road strategy. Furthermore, the recent announcements for store closures add to the increasing unemployment in the UK, which currently stands at 8,4%, a rate that has not been higher since 1995, according to ONS. This thesis aims to explore the social, political and

economic dynamics within the grocery retail sector and to examine the impact on the nature of work. Recognizing ‘Wal-Martization’ as the framework that drives the work organization, it is suggested that a closer look is necessary to understand how the changing terrain of food retailing in the UK impacts on the employment relationship.

2.4.2 The Cyprus regulatory framework and the Cyprus food retail sector

The latter objectives, as it was already pointed earlier in this thesis, are to be examined within a comparative analysis. The research is concerned with providing comparative data between the UK and Cyprus. What it is interesting, is that the Cyprus IR system is similar to the UK. Specifically, the current system of industrial relations was consolidated in the 1960 with the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, after years of colonization by the UK. The new Cypriot state constituted essentially a development of existing colonial structures, therefore, the IR system was constructed on the British model, with voluntarism and tripartite cooperation as its fundamental principles (Ioannou, 2011). Collective bargaining traditionally played a leading role in regulating employment, whereas state intervention was kept to the minimum (Soumeli, 2014). Ioannou (2011) further finds that collective bargaining is decentralised in Cyprus and takes place at the sectoral and the enterprise levels, and constitutes the primary mechanism for the regulation of the industrial relations. The trade unions, similarly to the UK, play a central role within the IR regulations in Cyprus, however, their power was gradually eroded (Ioannou, 2014; Katsourides, 2013). In fact the union density dropped below 50% between 2011-2013 (Soumeli, 2014). Katsourides (2013) suggests that this union density drop was the result of internal and external factors. Particularly, the latter author reports that the internal factors include, among others, workers’ contempt, the de-regulation of the economy, as well as the aggressiveness of employers to union organization, especially during recession. The outcome of the lower density, according to Ioannou (2011), is that the unions have abandoned strikes as a tool to generate change but they still use it as a bargaining tool with employers. Therefore, as Katsourides (2013, p.21) reports: ‘trade unions today are mostly perceived as organizations that offer services, rather than vehicles of struggle’. Nevertheless, in 2011 an upward trend in strike activity has been evidenced, which is mainly attributed to the measures related to the banking crisis (Soumeli, 2014). As Ioannou (2014, p.121) concludes, ‘the current crisis, exacerbated the already existing processes of labour market regulation, trade union decline and deterioration of employment relations’

The similarities between the UK's and Cyprus' IR system, and the trends in lower union density and increased intervention of the state are well recognized in the literature (Ioannou, 2011; Katsourides, 2013; Soumeli, 2014; Voss, 2011). In fact, the Cyprus state, similarly to the UK, regulates the employment relationship through the introduction of standards, such as the national minimum wage and working time for specific sectors. For example the retail sector, in general, is regulated by the Regulation of the Operation of Shops and Employment Terms of their Employees in 2006. However, it is important to note that there is an absence of a comprehensive NMW in Cyprus. The minimum wage, which, in terms of international comparison, is significantly high, is applicable only to specific occupations, which are considered vulnerable as they are not covered by collective agreements. There is a minimum wage for retail, whereas the hospitality sector, which is crucial for the Cyprus economy, is not subjected to the minimum wage, as it is covered by collective agreements (European Union Report, 2013).

The current economic and banking crisis though has led to a substantial rise in unemployment (Ioannou, 2014). Specifically, when the country entered the recession, unemployment, especially for young graduates, increased dramatically. European Statistics showed that in 2013, Cyprus unemployment jumped to 17.5%, the highest increase on unemployment within the Eurozone that year. The Cyprus Government, in an attempt to tackle the increasing unemployment, had provided an important revision of the 'Regulation of the operation of shops and the Employment Terms', instituting an extension of opening hours within the retail sector, including food-retailing. Understandably, the Cyprus state intervened and de-regulated the working time, as a response to the external environment, and subsequently the Ministry of Work reports the reduction on unemployment (Kathimerini, 2014/02/10).

Therefore, the re-configuration of the working time was a turning point for the Cyprus IR system, signifying a move to a more liberal economy. Nevertheless, as European reports indicate, the Cyprus economy and labour market is already characterized by flexibility (Voss, 2011). For example, regarding part-time and temporary work, although this represents a small fraction of employment, there has been a tendency for it to increase, with more employees, especially women, preferring these schemes, while the de-regulation of the working time encourages such contracts (Stavrou, 2010). The Cyprus economy, again, similarly to the UK, is a service economy. As Papalexandris and Stavrou-Costea (2004) argue, the impressive performance of the Cypriot economy, up to the early

2000s, has been driven mainly by the service sector, such as tourism and financial services, whereas retailing was an emerging market, and one that grown significantly the past decade. In fact, the employment in retail steadily increased over time, with more retail employees working on a part-time basis (Stavrou, 2012).

Finally, what it is important to emphasize regarding the food retail sector in Cyprus, is the re-structuring of the competition in this market, which was the result of the aggressive price war and, of course, the current recession. In fact, in 2005, international retailers invested in the Cyprus grocery retail market. In that period the market share was divided between four main players with 'Orphanides' being the market leader, followed by 'Carrefour', 'Alpha Mega' and CAC Papanтониου. These were the 'Big four' supermarkets in the island, until 2008 when Lidl also entered the market. Between 2012-2013, after the banking crisis, and with the recession deepening in Cyprus, the market had faced dramatic changes as a result of the market leader's bankruptcy, as well as the introduction of the austerity measures by the I.M.F. and the 47.5% "haircut" of individuals' deposits above €100,000. All these issues, in addition to increasing unemployment, have affected the Cypriots' buying power, and put the retail organizations at risk as they experienced an unstable financial era and struggled to survive in the market (EMCC, 2013/01/24; Stockwatch, 2013/01/30).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly discussed the main characteristics of the food retail job. It has identified the 'Wal-Martization' trend as the dynamic that shapes the low-road strategy adopted by grocers worldwide, aiming for lower costs and lower prices for their customers. The main argument of this chapter is that the employers' tactics to achieve lower costs, principally through managing and controlling labour costs, lead to tensions within the employment relationship and shape the food retail shop floor as a contested terrain. However, limited research has examined these issues within the food retail sector, and especially in an era of austerity. The question emerging from this chapter is to understand the political, economic, and social structures and dynamics within the grocery retail sector.

3. Locating Attendance at work within the labour process

This chapter discusses attendance and locates this behaviour within the labour process theory. It provides a sociological analysis on attendance and its position within the labour process and the control, resistance, consent model (Edwards and Whitston, 1993; Thompson and Newsome, 2004). The chapter first discusses attendance as a problem that it is commonly managed through discipline, and highlights its importance in lean regimes, such as food retailing (Taylor et. al, 2010). Next, it introduces the labour process theory and it discusses the contested employment relationship within lean work organizations. A brief discussion regarding the means of managerial control within the labour process is also provided, whereas a great focus is given on theorising resistance and consent. Finally, the chapter locates workplace attendance within this theoretical framework.

3.1 Managing Attendance: always problematic

Managing attendance at work is an area that has received a great deal of attention in the field of organizational research. Non-attendance at work is perceived as a major issue for organizations and one the biggest concerns for managers (Edwards, 2005; Torrington et al., 2005), whilst organizations might adopt a disciplinary approach to manage absence (CBI, 2011; CIPD, 2011; Edwards, 2005; Taylor et al., 2010; Wagner and Bankshares, 1990). As Edwards and Whitston (1993, p.7) put it, the management approach to attendance is “one of stick rather than carrot”. Similarly, the ‘Deviance model’ of absenteeism clearly suggests that discipline lies in the heart of absence management (Johns, 1997). Runcie (1988) (in Johns, 1994, p.229) suggests that absenteeism is often used as the classic example of worker deviance, which threatens the functioning of the organization. Thus, punishment is described as the common response to address this behaviour. Harrison and Martocchio (1998, p.331) support this argument and report that the deviance approach of Johns (1997) is the main framework for managing ‘organizational delinquencies’, including absenteeism.

Johns (1994) makes a distinction between a weaker form of deviance, which is perceived as problematic because it can be expensive and disruptive, and a stronger form of deviance that correlates absenteeism to malingering, disloyalty or laziness, which is also described as production deviance. Thus, disruption of production happens when someone “calls in sick when not” (Robinson and Bemmett, 1995 in Johns, 1997, p.151). It is understood that in either case, absenteeism is presented as a problematic occurrence, which according to Scott and Markham (1982) is managed though discipline and punishment. However,

Ashdown and Baker (1973) (in Edwards, 2005, p.377) make a distinction between “coercive and corrective” approaches to discipline, arguing that organizations step away from the former, which is based on strict rules and punishment, and move closer to the latter, which suggests that discipline is a process of change, rather than of punishment.

Kaiser (1998, p.92) suggests that research needs to account for the business environment within which absence behaviour takes place, while Marcus and Smith (1985, p.264) have suggested that research should examine the absence behaviour in different occupational, organizational and industrial lines. Undeniably, absenteeism and non-attendance are crucial facets of John’s (1994) withdrawal model within the supermarket industry, which managers must manage. Therefore, considering the extremely high turnover rates found in the food retail industry, it is argued that non-attendance is equally important (Peterson, 2005; Ton and Huckman, 2008).

Considering the context examined in this research, it is argued that the strong competitive pressures and the involvement of grocers in a ‘retail [price] war’, make attendance a crucial element to be managed (Patton and Johns, 2012). This is supported by Taylor et al (2010) who conclude that in highly competitive conditions within which organizations are pressured to keep labour costs low, attendance becomes critical especially because staffing levels become leaner (p.284). As the same authors conclude “in lean regimes, where staffing schedules are so tightly calibrated as to leave no surplus or non-engaged staff minimal amounts of non-attendance have the potential for serious disruption to the work process” (p.285). In addition, they suggest that more research is required with broader sectoral range to gain a better understanding of absence control, with retail described as an ideal case to be examined. Johns (2008) suggests that more attention needs to be paid to changing employment, emerging work designs, and the impact on attendance dynamics. This can be related to the need for flexibility on the food retail shop floor and the emergence of new types of part-time and temporary work contracts (Baret et al., 2000b; Wood and Burchell, 2014), as well as to the current changing economic environment within which food retailers operate.

As explained in the previous chapter, the ‘lean retailing’ principles adopted by grocers, bring the management of attendance to the forefront, in order to keep costs low and competitiveness high. Interestingly, the CIPD (2014) reports that the overall absence levels per employee, have fallen significantly across the UK economy, in comparison to previous years, while the ONS (2014b) also reports that sickness absence have fallen significantly

since 1993. Additionally, Eurofound (2013) reports that after 2008 there is a widespread trend of decreasing absence across Europe, which is mainly the outcome of the economic crisis. Although the levels of absence vary between European countries, this is a crucial finding for this thesis. In fact, the latter report shows that in the UK the absence levels followed a gradual decrease, whereas Cyprus saw an increase in absence during the first years of the crisis, which, though, was followed by a significant decrease in 2011, when the crisis had a greater impact on the economy. Therefore, in terms of the international comparison in this thesis, there are evidences that absence levels, across Europe, are dropping. Nevertheless, these data are not specific to the food retail sector, whereas our knowledge is still limited on how attendance is managed within this sector. Attendance is still though a crucial feature of the employment relationship that needs to be managed to maintain good staffing levels on the shop floor, especially in leaner work organizations. (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). Edwards (2005, p.393) notes that despite the cost pressures and the development of 'lean organizations', within which absenteeism gains increased importance, it has not been a prominent issue in the daily agenda of line managers or HR managers. These issues have not been examined extensively within the lean operational environment of food retailing. The chapter next develops a discussion regarding the latter approach and locates attendance within the labour process.

3.2 Lean workplaces, Labour Process theory and attendance

As the working environment gets leaner, attendance at work comes to the forefront. This relationship should be explained in more detail to understand why the latter is a vital issue within lean regimes.

Industrial relations scholars have a long history in attempting to analyse the employment relationship in lean working environments. One of the major theories within such a framework is the Labour Process Theory (LPT). Despite, the view of some that LPT died with Braverman and his followers, Thompson and Newsome (2004) argue that LPT remains the dominant approach to workplace studies in the UK and one that has influenced scholars globally. As the latter authors argue, LPT makes a useful contribution to theorising industrial relations. They note that there is a significant body of qualitative research that provides insights into 'observed behaviour' and practices in the world of work, as well as that the theory provides a conceptual framework that helps researchers to set work and employment relations in a broader context, making a contribution to the 'connectivity problem' (see Thompson and Newsome, 2004, p.133). This thesis uses LPT

as the theoretical backbone to explore attendance in the contemporary working environment. Specifically, the thesis explores the negotiation of attendance on the supermarket shop floor, and the manifestation of absence as an expression of industrial conflict, drawing on the discussions related to the control, resistance *and* [emphasis original] consent ternary model (Thompson and Newsome, 2004), which is a central theme within the capitalist labour process theory (Thompson, 1989). Similar to other writers (see for example Edwards, 1986), this thesis steps away from the dyadic ‘control versus resistance’ model to one that ‘recognizes a variety of forms of conflict and accommodation’ (Thompson and Newsome, 2004, p.139)

The term ‘capitalist labour process’ is adopted to provide the conceptual framework for this thesis. The term originates from Marx’s writings and suggests that the purpose of capitalist activity is laid down to the capitalist, whereas the means of production are the property of the latter (Brown, 1992). In other words, capitalism derives from the fact that the capitalist purchases the mechanisms of the labour process, including the means of production and the labour power (Thompson, 1989). Braverman’s (1974) work, despite criticisms, is as one of the most influential writings in LPT and describes the labour process as “the place where commodities were constructed and developed by mixing human labour with raw materials” (in Grint, 1998; 175). Marx suggests that workers are not selling their labour, but their labour power. Braverman (1974), whose analysis builds on and moves beyond Marx (Burawoy, 1978), suggests that workers are not selling themselves to the capitalist, rather they sell their labour power, meaning their capacity to work for a period of time. The worker is in a continuous relationship with the employer, and works under capital’s direction (Brown, 1992). In Marx’s words: “[Within] the [capitalist] labour process...capitalist consumes labour power...[and] the worker works under the *control* of capitalist” [emphasis added] (in Brown, 1992; 176).

Thompson (1989) notes that through this process, the capitalist aims to achieve what Marx calls ‘valorisation’, meaning the process of creating surplus value. The capitalist attempts to maximize surplus value through the exploitation of labour, the lengthening of working time, the intensification of labour, the increased division of labour, the mechanization of work, and the constant reduction of labour costs (Brown, 1992; Thompson, 1989). Thompson (1989) suggests that some identifiable tendencies are central to the capitalist labour process. Particularly, deskilling, fragmentation of tasks, hierarchical structures, the division between manual and mental work, and the struggle to establish the most effective

means to control labour, are central marks of the process and inherent characteristics of capitalism. These are also sources of industrial conflict and a conflict of interests between employers and workers, or, as Edwards (1986) refers to it, a source of ‘structured antagonism’.

Conflict is a significant feature in contemporary organizations (Collinson, 1994). Bélanger and Edwards (2013b, p.7) suggest that the term ‘conflict’ has two senses, namely, the underlying antagonism and clash of interests and concrete actions (such as strikes). The authors use the word contestation to highlight their focus on the material concrete action. Collinson (1994), using the word resistance, recognizes these actions as the worker’s response to managerial control, suggesting that conflict emerges within capitalism as a response to capitalists’ practices. Hebdon and Noh (2013) discuss conflict as a multi-faceted phenomenon and, using a Marxist perspective, discuss the workplace as a contested terrain. Within this terrain, social order is maintained through the suppression of the subordinates’ interests, through various forms of control mechanisms, whilst the manifestations of industrial conflict are linked to socio-political structures. Moreover, conflict might be also explained due to the asymmetry of power between employers and employees, which evolves through Capital’s ownership and control of the means of surveillance (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992 in May, 2002, p.773). Following Edwards (1979) arguments, Markowitz (1996) notes that the constant attempts by capitalist employers to extract increasing labour in order to maximize profit, leads to a slowdown in the production process, generating conflict.

This argument and the way conflict is generated within a capitalistic framework, is articulated in Beynon’s (1984) classic, ‘Working for Ford’. The author clearly illustrates the attempts of Ford to control the labour force and to maximize labour productivity, while, on the other hand, employees were resisting these attempts. Particularly, as Beynon (1984) writes: “the history of the assembly line is a history of *conflict* over speed-up” [emphasis added] (p.138). Edwards (2014) has recently discussed and assessed Beynon’s work and concludes that this work, although it was written forty years ago, explains how and why workers are involved in battles to control the workplace, and contributes to areas of continuity with the contemporary organization of labour and struggles for workers’ dignity. Nonetheless, it should not be assumed that industrial conflict happens only in manufacturing. Gall (2013) notes that resistance is evidenced within services, suggesting

that emotional and aesthetic labour, as well as the domination of technology, are the foundations upon which worker resistance could rest.

Edwards (1986) develops a theory around industrial conflict, by referring to the relations of antagonism that exist within the exploitative employment relationship, and not to a general term for social conflict. Edwards recognizes that the problem of transformation of labour power into effective labour is distinct from other social processes and it is the basis for antagonism between labour and the employer. Contrary to Burawoy's (1979) belief that the external social life of workers is irrelevant to their working life and that it has no impact on how conflict is situated, Edwards (1986, p.48) suggests that, although working life is distinct from social life, it has own customs, norms and understandings. He also suggests that the social status of the workers still influences their perceptions and their behaviour on the shop floor. The latter argument is supported by Fleming (2013, p.57) who puts forward the question of 'how does one resist a workplace...[as it] infects our social being?'

Additionally, Edwards (1986, p.32) suggests that work is not a pure technical activity and certainly it is not a process in which interests of workers and employers can be assumed to be the same. Edwards (1979) reports that the interests of workers and those of employers clash, noting "what is good for one is frequently cost for the other" (p.12), resulting in the emergence of conflict within the workplace. This thesis recognizes that there are differences in the interests of the organizational actors, which allow greater scope for conflict to emerge within organizations (Strangleman and Warren, 2008, p.190). Therefore, workplace conflict is indeed embedded in the employment relationship (Hebdon and Noh, 2013).

Edwards (1979) argues that the workplace becomes a battleground with employers attempting to extract the maximum effort from workers, while the latter inevitably resist. In other words, as the same author puts it: "the labour process becomes an arena of class conflict and the workplace becomes a *contested terrain*" [emphasis added] (Edwards, 1979, p.16). The term emphasized suggests that workplace conflict governs the evolution of forms of control within the organization (Thompson, 1989). In other words, the 'contested terrain' stresses the necessity for capitalist control over the labour process, which stems from the contradictory nature of capitalist production and the antagonistic social relations between capital and labour (Gottfried, 1994). This is a fundamental Marxist argument suggesting that the relationship between capital and labour is combative (Strangleman and Warren, 2008). This is still a persistent argument found in the labour

process literature and in sociological approaches on work, within which the fundamental interest is to understand the relationships between employees and employers (Watson, 2003), whilst control is perceived as a central area of analysis (Strangleman and Warren, 2008).

The major writers in the labour process stream have retained Marx's framework of labour power and stress that the employer acquires only the potential for labour. For example, Edwards (1978) follows a Marxist description of the social relations at the point of production, and suggests that Capitalists operate to make profits. To achieve that, they are involved in a process that begins with the conversion of money-capital into what is needed for production, including investments in labour. The capitalist employer organizes the labour process, whereby the proxies of production are transformed into products or services and are then sold and converted back to money and profit in the case that the amount exceeds that invested initially. The focus by Edwards (1978) is given to the organization of the labour process, arguing that employers engage in two tasks. The first is the coordination of social production. As Edwards suggests, "any production process that involves many persons must be consciously *directed* to ensure coordination" (p.109). The second task originates from the class nature of the capitalist labour process. Employers do not only coordinate, they must also 'compel'. This term was originally used by Edwards (1978) to signify the necessity for managers, as agents of the capital, to persuade their subordinates, mainly through means subtle or brutal, to produce commodities that will generate profit for the former (p.110). He notes that in a competitive marketplace, Capitalists are forced to extract as much useful labour from their workers as possible, in order to stay in business.

Similarly, Friedman (1977) refers to Marx and his emphasis on the managerial problem under capitalism by describing labour power as a variable capital. In common with Braverman, Friedman follows Marx in describing labour power as a commodity that needs to be controlled. Therefore, the managerial function is to exercise authority over employees. This gives weight to Marx's critique on capitalism, stating that labour within capitalism is treated as an object, rather than a subject of the labour process (May, 1999). However, although labour within capitalism is perceived as a commodity, it differs from other types of commodity, due to the social relations found within the employment relationship (Hyman, 1989a). Indeed, as Marx insisted, control is not simply a technical constraint, but a social consequence of capitalist relations of production (see Hyman,

1989a, p.29). Similarly, as Noon and Blyton (1997) argue, “the meaning of work is a clear social, as well as economic dimension” (in May 2002, p.769). Hence, labour power is a different kind of ‘commodity’ due to the social nature of employment. That is to say, the *indeterminacy of labour power* is what provokes the necessity for control. Capital attempts to solve the indeterminacy of labour power, and convert the latter into useful labour, as well as to secure surplus value, through control (Gottfried, 1994; Strangleman and Warren, 2008). As Flaherty (1991) suggests, the purpose of control is to reduce uncertainty about the amount of labour performed by a given amount of labour power. Therefore, the argument that the systematic control of labour by the capital is necessary to transform labour power to profitable labour is supported (Thompson, 1989). However, Thompson (1990) argues that although indeterminacy generates indispensability for control, it does not prescribe what specific form the control must take (Gottfried, 1994).

3.2.1 Capitalist control: A brief theoretical discussion

Control lies at the centre of the core theory of labour process and although it is not a central objective of this thesis, is still an imperative apparatus within the effort-bargain and the triadic model of labour process (Thompson, 1989; Thompson and Newsome, 2004). Therefore, this section provides a brief theoretical discussion regarding the modes of control within the labour process.

Capitalists have developed a variety of strategies to control the labour process (Meiksins, 1994) and the mode of production, in order to turn labour power into labour for profitable production. Academics have identified those strategies within theoretical frameworks and capitalism ‘schemas’. Thomson and van den Broek (2010) discuss the development of managerial control and workplace regimes over the last 25 years. Even though this analysis leaves some gaps, as the authors themselves accept, they have adequately captured the progress of managerial control during the three past decades. Starting from the 1970s, and the domination of post-Braverman contributions by writers such as Friedman (1977), Edwards (1979), Burawoy (1985) and others, make clear that the ‘control imperative’ perception within the capitalistic labour process originated from Marxism and Taylorism. The following decade sees the emergence of the “disappearance of control debate” among academics. Yet, the term ‘disappearance’ does not describe accurately what academics actually had in mind. The point was that control has been transformed and moved away from the classic studies of Edwards and Friedman. Control was now translated through normative forms such as culture and soft-HRM, showing a clear influence by Foucault.

Finally, the new century sees a turn, with the 'call centre debate' becoming dominant. Efforts to extend monitoring, measurement and control of the qualitative aspects of performance are the key findings of the era. Such discussions have been extended to the service economy and the rationalization of the service work with the 'McDonaldization' thesis becoming the trigger point of analysis (Hales, 2001a; Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996a; Ritzer, 1998), whereas this thesis extends this discussion, introducing the dynamics deriving through the 'Wal-Martization' trend.

Friedman (1977a) reports that the word 'control' *per se* has caused confusion when applied to the labour process. This confusion derives from the usage of the word as it has been used both to identify those 'in control' as well as to indicate the degree of power used by people to direct work. Space restrictions preclude engagement with the wider debate in this area. However, Friedman's (1977a) definition of control is useful suggesting: "To control is to exercise *restraint* or direction upon the action of a force or thing" (p.46). Similarly, Edwards (1990a) (see Gottfried, 1994 p.105) describes control "as a system of regulations...that tends to rule out others".

Both Friedman (1977b) and Edwards (1979) have developed categories of control applied in organizations. In particular, Friedman (1977a) presents two strategies of control, named as 'direct control' and 'responsible autonomy', whilst Edwards (1979) presents a historical analysis of control, examining the changing patterns of control in a parallel evolution and transformation of capitalism, identifying three main control strategies: 'Simple, Technical and Bureaucratic control'. The two frameworks present similarities. Particularly, both authors are concerned with control and resistance, while in both publications the historical element is fundamental. Moreover, both Friedman and Edwards make a distinction between core and periphery controls and both analyses operate within similar matrixes (see Nichols, 1981, p.151). Yet, contemporary research has questioned the applicability of these strategies in the 'new economy'.

Turning firstly to Friedman (1977a, 1977b), Thompson (1989) argues that Friedman provides a valuable insight, which adds to the LPT and the understanding of the variety of means of control. In the same vein, Purcell and Sisson (1983) argue that the strategies suggested by Friedman can be seen the more concrete styles of control (see Edwards, 2003, p.16). Particularly, Friedman makes a distinction between 'direct control' and 'responsible autonomy'. The former adopts 'Taylorism' principles and attempts to limit worker's autonomy, in contrast to the latter where autonomy is obviously the central component.

Although, Friedman sometimes presented these control strategies as ‘polar opposites’, Edwards (2003) suggests that these should be seen as combined elements. Indeed, Thompson (1989) through his analysis proves that the two strategies co-existed on the shop floor, whilst Belanger and Edwards (2013b) argue that these strategies are to a degree orthogonal. Brown (1992) discusses the important limitations to Friedman’s account in the understanding of capitalist control, stating that the distinction between the two strategies is simplistic, as it only presents one dimension of control and it has not exhausted the available possibilities and choices by management. Yet, Edward’s (1979) work came later to reconsider the control over the capitalist labour process. However, the similarities with Friedman are apparent in Edward’s work in terms of the changing nature of capitalism and the development of monopoly capitalism (Brown, 1992).

Edwards (1979, p.17) defines control as “the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain desired work behaviour from workers”. He also defines the *system of control* as a mode that co-ordinates three elements. Specifically, he refers to the mechanisms to direct work, the process within which the employer aims to supervise, evaluate or correct failures in production, and the mechanisms used to discipline and reward employees in order to promote cooperation and amplify compliance with the directions of the labour process as these are defined by the employer. Edwards (1979) suggests that systems of control have undergone dramatic changes in response to changes in capitalism, which is a central theme to his analysis. As Hyman (1989a) stresses, capitalism is inherently dynamic and the entire economic system, as well as employment relations are subject to crises. Consequently, the “patterns of managerial control are necessarily unstable” (p.32). Following a historical examination of the transformation of capitalism and the consequent impact on systems of control, Edwards (1979) described three progressing types of control ‘Simple, Technical, and Bureaucratic’. However, although these types of control are described as distinct in Edward’s book, literature suggests that they also co-exist in the contemporary economy. Besides, as Edwards (1979) recognizes, a particular control strategy cannot itself form an adequate control system, and it needs to be combined with another types of control.

Edwards (1979) and Friedman (1977a, 1977b) developed two of the most popular control frameworks developed within the industrial relations and industrial sociology literature. Nevertheless, others have also developed their theoretical agenda around control. Burawoy (1985) for example provides a wide range of different ways in which control may be exercised, making a distinction between “market despotic” and “hegemonic” types of

factory regime. The differences between these regimes have an impact on the labour power, and each regime has its own characteristics and it is differentiated according to the market needs and the intervention of the state (Brown, 1992). Hence, it may be argued that control emerges through different initiatives and motives. Another example is the introduction of normative control, which introduces a different view in the debate. Particularly, such initiatives aim to develop an emotional attachment to the organization and self-control through the instruction of shared corporate beliefs, norms and values (Sturdy et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, in the new economy different workplaces and work regimes need different control strategies (Edwards and Whitston, 1989b). As the latter authors suggest, regimes are complex and the idea of a dominant approach would be mistaken. Therefore, studies have shown the different forms of management control in different contexts (in Sturdy et al., 2010). Yet, as Edwards (1979), and others in more recent writings, suggest, different forms of control coexist and sometimes interact in complex combinations (Brown, 1992; Callaghan and Thompson, 2001; Sturdy et al., 2010). As Gabriel (2005, p.186) argues “different organizations employ different strategies of control and that even within a single organization, individuals are subject to different modes of control”. Hence, to link the last two arguments, the application of a variety of control modes in the workplace, and the adoption of different control strategies in different organizations, needs to be understood in relation to particular working regimes and the characteristics of a specific work organization.

An important aspect that this thesis focuses on is the control of attendance in a new context. Following Edward’s and Whitston’s (1993) contribution in this area, who discuss the linkages between management control, discipline and attendance, this thesis is interested to examine these issues in a different context, such as the international market of food retailing, in which work is organized based on the global trend of Wal-Martization. Thompson and Newsome (2004, p.158) open the discussion on the future of LPT, noting that in the possible upcoming ‘fourth wave’ for labour process theory, the emphasis should be on the political economy contexts in which labour interests and power resources are mobilized. Researchers need to re-conceptualize the new rules of the global political economy to understand the levels and influences on work organization and politics.

3.2.2 Theorizing resistance and industrial conflict

The section above has briefly discussed some key points in the theoretical framework of managerial control. What it is important to emphasize at this point are the different modes of control found in particular workplaces and working regimes (see Sturdy et al., 2010), as well as the emergence of conflict and consent as the outcomes of the system of control. Blyton and Turnbull (2004) note that since the patterns of control are different, consequently conflict expression is expected to be different. In a similar vein, Jermier et al., (1994) note that the nature of resistance is expected to vary across space and time as it is theorized on a particular context. The latter authors provide a short historical analysis on resistance theorization and suggest that the empirical literature on resistance focuses on male blue-collar factory workers, who fight, a presumed, common identifiable cause, whilst analyses of non-factory settings have traditionally neglected resistance as a focal point.

Maybe the most striking example of such studies is the work of Braverman (1974), which though, has been heavily criticized for neglecting the subjective nature of work and the potential resistance by workers (Burawoy, 1978; Meiksins, 1994). Braverman and his analysis of Taylorism and Marxism assumed that such regimes are adopted uncontested by workers (Grint, 1998). Even in the writings that followed the seminal 'Labour and Monopoly Capital', Braverman (1980) again failed to recognize resistance patterns against capitalist control. In fact, as Grint (1998) argues, Braverman mistakenly believes that there is only one-way to organize production efficiently, and that is through the alienation of workers from their work. This is most apparent in his writings on office work. Although he moved beyond the manufacturing context and tried to analyse the labour process in a non-factoring regime, he suggests that Taylorist principles and motion studies are the only way to control the labour process. Yet, Braverman's focus has been on the outcomes of Taylorism, rather than the examination of how people respond to it (Burawoy, 1978). Hence, what missing is the workers' response and their resistance to task specification. The response to control through Taylorist principles is underdeveloped in Braverman's analysis (Burawoy, 1978; Grint, 1998; Meiksins, 1994).

However, this is far from supporting the conclusion that contestation is completely absent. Industrial conflict is still part of the organizational life (Williams, 2014), but occasionally is spontaneous and/or individual (Salaman, 2001, p.129–130). As Hyman (1989b, p.113) argues 'the suggestion that there is no conflict...within modern industry cannot be taken

seriously', while likewise Mumby (2005) argues that workplace resistance is alive and flourishing. Similarly, Collinson (1994, p.25) concludes that "resistance remains a persistent, significant and remarkable feature of the contemporary workplace which requires further and more detailed examination". Hence, Edward's (1979) argument that conflict is inherent in a capitalist system is well supported by research.

Edwards (1979) stresses a dialectical relationship between workers and their superiors in particular workplaces, industries, and countries (Strangleman and Warren, 2008; 189) suggesting a continuous struggle over work, with the latter group trying to control the former and consequently resistance emerges. This is supported by Hyman (1989b, p.96) who suggests that "the exercise of managerial control is a persistent basis of conflict", while Gottfried (1994) suggest that research on resistance identifies continuous conflict as a normal aspect of the work organization.

Collinson (1994, p.51) argues, "Resistance and control might be the reproduction of one another". Mumby (2005, p.23) also by adopting the dialectical approach, argues that resistance is an ongoing process between the organizational actors, who through tensions and contradictions aim to shape the workplace practices. Hence, the concepts of resistance and control are interlinked and where the 'control blend' is unique in organizations, conflict might also have a singular form under that specific regime. The relationship between the two concepts might have important organizational effects, which, though, cannot be specified outside the particular context that they are applied (Collinson, 1994; 52).

Salaman (2001, p.124), discussing Crozier (1964), suggests that organisations are characterised by constant and continuing conflict. Particularly, relating this argument with the discussion on class conflict, and the Marxist view on the employment relationship, Salaman (2001) accepts that those systems designed by management to monitor and give directions to subordinates, may lead to resistance and effort by workers to escape hierarchical control. Mumby (2005, p.23) describes resistance as "an effort to engage in some form of praxis – individual or collective, routine or organized - in a specific context of established social patterns and structures, including mechanisms of control".

Salaman (2001) states that conflict acts are often individualised, spasmodic, and intermittent. The theory on conflict has been developed and now the argument is more intensively suggesting that conflict has not been eliminated and eroded, but its manifestation has changed (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Hodson, 1995). For instance,

undeniably, strikes are the most common and visible expression of conflict (Hyman, 1989b), whilst it dominates analyses of conflict in employment relations (Williams, 2014). However, even though resistance might be expressed through such an organized and collective praxis, as Mumby (2005) suggests, it is more likely in the contemporary capitalist society to be expressed in a more silent, individual and unorganized form.

Hyman (1989b), explains the rationale of industrial conflict and suggests that human action is purposive, that is based on an individual's interpretation of reality and that it is driven by the interpretation of choices that are open to the person. This this gives emphasis to the argument that conflict has been diverted into alternative, less organized and less overt forms of expression and to more individualized praxis of resistance (Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Godard, 2011; 283; Hyman, 1989b). Therefore, the forms of conflict have changed, with strikes, as the traditional expression of conflict, being in decline (see Gall, 2013; van Wanrooy et al., 2013). As Williams (2014, p.273-274) notes, "Conflict in employment relations is about much more than strikes, manifesting itself in a variety of forms". Indeed, resistance is not static. It has developed, it has changed forms, and it has been adapted to the 'new capitalism'. Therefore, conflict is not just restricted to strikes (Williams, 2014). In fact, today it is less frequently expressed through formal disputes, such as strikes, and is more likely to be expressed through informal actions, such as absenteeism, sabotage, pilferage and other similar actions (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Hyman, 1989a, 1989b; Jermier et al., 1994; Kelly, 1998).

Conflict remains as a systemic response to a form of work organisation that is designed to exercise control and power over worker's tasks, to pursuit the fulfilment of the objectives and interests of the employer (Salaman, 2001). Yet, "the exercise of managerial control, as the basis of conflict, leads only periodically to overt conflict" (Hyman, 1989b, p.96, emphasis mine). Hence, conflict is still embedded in the employment relationship, as classical writings suggest, yet, with a different shape (Hodson, 1995). However, this is not to assume that collective manifestation of conflict is dead, it is just "dormant" (Godard, 2011, p.288). Yet, as Williams (2014) argues, labour conflict, and particularly collective action has not become less relevant, but it has diminished in importance. The current recession has identified strikes, across Europe, with wider political struggles against austerity, rather than being manifested as a withdrawal from work, and formal industrial conflict, as it was in the past (Godard, 2011). Strike activity, and other conventional forms of organized industrial conflict, have become less common, compared to the past, while

industrial conflict encompass more forms of unorganized conflict and organizational misbehaviour (Williams, 2014).

3.2.2.1 Unorganized conflict

Grint (1998) argues that although class conflict has received great attention within the sociology of work, most of this has been focused on the industrial action of strikes, while the amount of studies about non-organized conflict, such as absenteeism, sabotage and so on, is small in comparison. It is argued that to understand the significance of conflict within the contemporary employment relations it is necessary to look beyond strike activities (Williams, 2014). Indeed, there seems to be an augmentation to researchers' interest towards non-organized conflict forms. A number of IR researchers and work sociologists are now more concentrated to conflict forms other than strikes (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Edwards et al., 1995; P. K. Edwards and Whitston, 1993; Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Fleming and Spicer, 2010; Godard, 2011; Tucker, 1993; Turnbull and Sapsford, 1992).

However, Mumby (2005) reports that in the latter research cluster there is little concentration on the everyday dynamics of organizational life and the ways that organization members engage in struggle actions. Mumby, (2005, p.31) espouses Hodson's conclusion that resistance is still an underdeveloped concept that is neglected by sociologists.

Nichols (1980) discusses the mechanization of the physical gesture to explain why employees resist. The phrase 'trained gorilla' is used by the latter author to describe this process. It is suggested that workers are more than a trained animal that is trained to act a repetitive monologue. The worker remains a 'man' [sic] and in the case that they feel that they are reduced to a trained gorilla, they can then drive their attitudes far from conformity and consequently resist. However, what Nichols (1980) is not answering, is how a 'man' [sic] resists. This is not just a rhetorical question for researchers and sociologists. As it is obvious in the literature, the answer is thoroughly given by academics, as to what tools of resistance are available to employees. For instance, Tucker (1993) illustrates the forms of behaviour that can be identified as resistance by temporary workers to managerial controls. The author finds gossip, toleration, and resignation as the most popular actions to resist, while sabotage, theft, and non-cooperation, are sporadically emerging as conflict expressions. In contrast, collective responses, formal complaints, and legal actions are rarely used by temporary employees. The last argument gives weight to the contemporary theoretical argument, suggesting that formal and collective conflict is in decline. Yet,

turning to the focus of this research, Tucker (1993) has not mentioned absenteeism as a form of resistance by temporary employees. Although resignation is described in his study as one of the significant conflict expression behaviours, this relates to permanent quitting of the job, rather than temporary/short-term absence. This supports the arguments of different conflict manifestations in different working regimes.

3.2.3 Consent: The middle way

As the sections above discussed, industrial conflict is, and it should be perceived as endemic to the capitalist employment relationship and inherent to the organizational life (Collinson, 1994; Courpasson et al., 2011; Jermier et al., 1994; Mumby, 2005; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). Nevertheless, it should not be presumed that subordinates/employees are always involved in a contested relationship with their superiors. Such a generalization on the attitude of lower level employees is mistaken. Employees might indeed consent with the organisational directions whereas the classic arguments for a continual battle with the management, and/or towards the organization of work are replaced by arguments referring to consent and co-operation within the employment relationship.

Godard (2011) refers to “Triumph of capitalism” reporting that employees are accepting their subordination and have lost their psychological capacity to resist. The author also reports that causes of conflict in general have declined with sources of peace increasing. Hence the “erosion of the will to struggle” is the result of the new managerial paradigms as described by Godard (2011, p.294). It is clear that the concept of consent co-exists with resistance within the workplace. Yet, this is not a new development (Thompson, 1989), but as Thompson and Newsome (2004) argue in their historical analysis of the development and transformation of the theory, the labour process theory has moved from a control-resistance dualism, to a control, resistance and consent model, introducing the theory to a different wave of thought and theorization.

A significant interest on the triadic model was found in the second wave of labour process research (Thompson and Newsome, 2004), whereas the concept of consent originates from the writings of Burawoy (1985, 1979). The latter author’s ethnographic research in a factory attempts to answer different but equally important questions such as, “Why do workers work as hard as they do, and why they cooperate and consent to their own exploitation?” (see Burawoy, 1979, p.xi). *Manufacturing Consent*, the result of the author’s research, brings together the original Marxist theory and the capitalist labour process, and comes to suggest that “coercion alone could no longer explain what workers did once they arrived on

the shop floor” (p.xii), whereas ‘an element of spontaneous consent combines with coercion to shape productive activities’ (p.xii). In a similar vein, Edwards (1990b) highlights the importance of consent, as well as coercion, in controlling labour because the complete removal of worker’s discretion is impossible. As again Burawoy (1979, p.27) puts it, “...coercion must be supplemented by the organisation of consent”. Brown (1992) discusses the ambivalent nature of the employer-employee relationship. On one hand, he accepts the contestation of the latter and the conflicting interests of the two parties as the outcome of the wage-effort bargain. On the other hand, the author suggests that employees and employers have a common interest, and that is the continuing success of the organization. Commenting on Marx and Braverman, and their exaggeration and misinterpretation on the nature and the degree of control, Brown (1992), quoting Cressey and MacInnes (1980), argues that Capital, on one hand, continues to enforce valorisation, but on the other hand it relies on “labour’s cooperation in order to get work performed” (Brown, 1992, p.213). Understandably, control of the labour process becomes a complex matter, which lies on contradictory activities. Employers necessarily have to secure employees’ consent and at the same time retain control over the labour process and the means of production. This explains previous arguments which suggest that the ‘blend of control’ might vary between workplaces, as the capitalist’s means to retain control have to be combined with control as coordination (Brown, 1992). This contradictory stance in capitalist control is indicated by Burawoy (1978, p.260), who discusses a “dilemma of capitalist control to secure surplus value while at the same time keeping it hidden”, arguing that this is, partly, met by the separation of ‘ownership and control’ (in Brown, 1992, p.213-214).

Burawoy (1979) moved beyond these considerations and also discussed the significance of other processes by which consent is secured, which are inherent in the labour process. As Thompson (1989) notes, Burawoy (1979) stresses the part that the workers play in creating the conditions for consent through their means of adapting to work. The latter author suggests that capital still needs to secure the surplus value and this can only be achieved through mechanisms in which workers participate, rather than through coercion. This leads to Burawoy’s famous concept of the labour process as a “series of games” (see Thompson, 1989, p.267). Thompson (1989, p.160) defines games as “informal rules and practices aimed at creating space and time, controlling earnings and making work more interesting”. Burawoy (1979, p.85) calls this process as ‘making out’. The author notes that the dominance of making out arises in a specific set of relations in production that reflect the

capital's interest in generating profit, and they cannot be understood simply through the external goal of achieving greater earnings. He continues arguing that the rewards of making out are defined in terms of factors immediately related to the labour process, such as reducing of fatigue, passing time, and relieving boredom, and factors that emerge from the labour process, such as making out on a tough job.

Burawoy (1978, p.271) notes, "these games are modes of adaption, a source of relief from the irksomeness of capitalist work". The author goes on to suggest that these games provide to workers the means to absorb frustration, to diffuse conflict and generally they facilitate 'adjustment to work', on one hand, and on the other hand "they also tend to undermine managerial objectives, reduce productivity and waste time" (p.270-271). These connect to Thompson's (1989, p.161) argument that "the pattern of games and practices shapes a distinctive pattern of conflict". The author refers to the tensions within the employment as the consequence of the managerial control and allocation of sources, but suggests that these are often experienced as obstructions on the part of other workers and in turn "accentuates a lateral conflict that is endemic to the organization of work" (Burawoy, 1979, p.66 in Thompson, 1989, p.161).

Although, Burawoy's work is focused on a specific environment and work organization, piecework, which is not characteristic of most industrial situations, especially in the contemporary era and the flourishing of services in the western economy, these arguments are supported by other authors and even more recent research. Thompson (1989, p.162) gives the examples of Beynon Nichols and Armstrong, and the informal adaptations of workers in the case of ChemCo, and refers to the work of Nichols and Armstrong (1979) within which workers have "devised their own particular means of getting by" (p.73) to survive in the alienating surroundings. Similar to these classic writings Baines and Cunningham (2011) discuss how care workers responded and adjusted to violence by practicing, what the authors call, and 'white knuckle care'. Care workers adopted their own means of 'getting by' and played games, such as bravado, humour and refusing to see themselves as victims, to normalize this behaviour, whilst they accepted the management's message of violence being 'part of the job'.

McCabe (2014) is concerned with analysing how employees in the banks back office are involved in contradictory acts that combine elements of resistance, or as the author calls it "making out", and consent – "making on". It should be recognized that some accounts, which deal with the issues of consent/resistance, such as McCabe's (2014), have operated

from the more post-structural perspective, locating debate within notion of power and discourse. Although this still insights into the nuances of consent and resistance, for the purpose of this thesis consent and resistance are located firmly within the dynamics of the labour process and the transformation of work. Saying that, McCabe agrees with Collinson's (1994, p.29) position that "resistance frequently contains elements of consent and consent incorporates aspects of resistance". As he notes, his article "highlights the ambiguous and contradictory nature of consent and resistance, but it draws a distinction on the basis that some endeavours work against the grain of corporate intentions whereas others work with them", and concludes that 'resistance is bound up with consent' (McCabe, 2014, p.59). Indeed, as the same author concludes, some employees were 'making out' and found ways to challenge and reduce the intense control in their working life, whereas back-office workers were 'making out' and played a game, which "becomes an end itself, overshadowing, masking and even inverting the conditions out of which it emerges", as Burawoy (1979, p.81-82) notes. This gives emphasis to the contradictory nature of resistance and consent, whilst it also highlights the blurred boundaries between the two. Edwards (1990b, p. 42) suggests that the labour contract involves co-operation as well as conflict and notes that employees do not divide their time between co-operating and shirking but, as he argues, 'one activity can involve both. Labour relations involve the joint creation of conflict and co-operation'.

McCabe (2014, p.57) reports that "employees engage in activities [games] that are a messy combination of resistance *and* consent [emphasis original]". Burawoy (1979) questions though the origin of the games. He accepts that the games arise from worker initiatives in a search of enduring subordination to the labour process, but he challenges the argument that 'games are the spontaneous, autonomous, malevolent creation of the worker' (p.86). He suggests that games are 'regulated, coercively where necessary, by management' (p.86). Therefore, the question is "who establishes the game, its rules, and its objectives, in the first place?" (Burwaoy, 1978, p.273). Edwards (1990) discusses the double balance of conflict and co-operation, while Thompson (1989, p.163) argues that there is a shift from coercion to consensual hegemony in the organization of the labour process. Stepping away from the radical models of LPT, which suggest the inevitability of conflict, the theory is moving towards a model of co-operation, within which the employer aims to control workers, as well as to release their creativity (Edwards, 1990b). As the same author notes, "efficiency depends on workers' active co-operation in production and not on containing shirking" (p.44). In addition, workers do resist their subordination but at the same time,

they have to co-operate with employers because they rely on them for their livelihoods (Edwards, 1990b, p.44). Going back to Burawoy (1978), the author reports that for the most part, shop floor management is actively engaged in organizing and facilitating games and are concerned to secure co-operation. In a similar vein, Edwards (1990b, p.47) notes, “Shop managers tolerate the bending of rules because they know that this is the only way to get work done”. However, as Buwawoy also suggests, there is a division in management, with senior managers not allowing the permanent repeal of the rules, as they are losing the means of monitoring or controlling the shop floor (Edwards, 1990b, p.47). The latter author uses fiddling to conceptualize and explain the participation of the shop floor managers in this ‘game’. He discusses both the encouragement and the indulgence of fiddling and suggests that, “workers and managers are tied together in relations of co-operation and conflict and endeavour to work out acceptable compromises” (p.53).

This was obvious in the case study of McCabe (2014), where managers employed both ‘rational’ and ‘normative’ controls in an attempt to produce a consenting environment that challenged managerially defined norms. In Baines and Cunningham’s (2011) international research, the managers were also swinging between coercion and co-operation. For example, the authors report the decentralization of care standards and regulations, through informal actions and informal empowerment, giving a higher degree of autonomy for workers in setting the order for and carrying out daily work tasks and activities, whereas some line managers had persuaded employees not to document violent incidents. Understandably, as empirical research reveals and as Edwards (1990b) concludes, the labour process still involves negotiation. However, this is an informal negotiation of order between, mainly, the shop floor management and workers (Edwards and Whitston, 1993), and differs from collective bargain (Edwards, 1990b) and as Thompson (1989, p.165) notes, “there has been a broad shift to consensual methods of organizing workers in the labour process”. This does not mean that contestation is absent from the labour process. The workplace remains a ‘contested terrain’, however, capital is called to re-organize the labour process “in such a way to minimize workers’ opportunities for resistance and even alter worker’ perceptions of the desirability of opposition” (Burawoy, 1978, p.16 in Thompson, 1989, p.165).

The arguments presented so far indicate the need to explore how structural conditions are interpreted in the continuing relationship between managers and workers (Edwards, 1990b, p.56). The theoretical problems regarding the negotiation of order and the lack of

consideration regarding the sources of consent have been recognized in literature (Edwards, 1990b). What is missing within these writings is the link between the context and the contemporary discussions on the new model of control, resistance, and consent. The blurred boundaries and the balance between the latter two elements of the model (Edwards, 1990b), as well as the complexity of the notion of control (Brown, 1992) are still contemporary issues in the labour process debate and as Kärreman and Alvesson (2009, p. 1115) note, “The answers to these questions in organizational analysis depend on the context”. In contrast to Burawoy’s (1979) belief that the external factors have very limited relevance and his failure to account national and sectoral differences, and, generally, to contextualize his arguments, it is argued that workers’ behaviour in work can be strongly influenced by external factors (Thompson, 1989).

Thompson (1989, p.172) argues, regional variations are an important source that, indirectly, shapes peoples’ ideas that affect the immediate work experience. He also concludes that external stratifications and divisions, such as geographic location, need to be examined in terms of their own independent dynamics (p.179). Additionally, although some research has discussed these issues in the service sector (see for example Baines and Cunningham, 2011; McCabe, 2014), limited research has focused on the food retail sector and its distinctive organization of the labour process, which is based on the international trend of ‘Wal-Martization’. This thesis is ‘positioned’ in the fourth wave of the labour process analysis and considers the political economy and the element of the recession in particular, as the variables that impact on our understanding of the triadic model of the new labour process.

3.2.4 (Non) Attendance at work: A sociological analysis

Blyton and Turnbull (2004) note that there seems to be a distinction between the term ‘absence’ and ‘absenteeism’ (Edwards and Whitston, 1989b). The former indicates excusable non-attendance actions, whilst, in contrast, the latter implies deliberate non-attendance to work. Yet, the authors suggest that such a distinction is often blurred (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004, p.354).

Robson (2008) provides a criticism on the terminology used by researchers in this area. Specifically, she argues that authors often use absence and absenteeism interchangeably neglecting the negative connotations related to the latter term. Moreover, it is suggested that terminology becomes more complicated with the introduction of ‘attendance management’ as an alternative to ‘absence or absenteeism management’. The former

approach focuses more on a positive attitude to reduce absence, in an endeavour to encourage attendance rather than to punish absence. Edwards (2005) discusses the best practice on attendance with record keeping, return-to-work interviews, the involvement of line managers, and the regular contact with absent employees as part of this model. Edwards goes on to suggest that this approach is mainly 'consensus based', giving the example of the return-to-work interviews, as a practice that aims to improve attendance for those with high absence levels rather than used as a disciplinary process. Yet, as the same author argues, what is missing from this list is the 'attendance cultures'. This relates to theoretical discussions on attendance control and consent building. As this chapter has suggested earlier, research shows that a punitive and disciplinary approach is still central to the management of (non)attendance (Edwards, 2005, Edwards and Whitston, 1993; Taylor et al, 2010). Henry (1987), though, in addition to the punitive aspects of discipline, discusses an accommodative-participative model, which "refers to workers' ways of devising their own rules and the common tendency for managements to tolerate this practice and to contribute to the emergence of custom and practice rules" (in Edwards and Whitston, 1993, 231). Edwards and Whitston (1993) have been interested to explore these dynamics and the re-structuring of workplace relations, as well as the emergence of negotiation of order and custom and practice on the shop floor. However, the authors showed that in all organizations the formal rules to manage absence were tightening, whereas in British Rail, for example, informal practices grew up and a relaxed approach by management to absence control was evident. Edwards and Whitston also conclude though that in FinCo managers allowed high rates of short absences, while workers interpreted the relaxed approach as permitting a little time off work. This generated a particular attendance culture within this organization within which managers did not see absence as a reflection of employees' irresponsibility, whereas the latter did not see absence as a way to protest. In contrast, in Multiplex they found that the particular strict controls in place had restricted absence frequency. This shows that the approach to absence control varies among workplaces regimes, while it is required to understand better these elements within the labour process in lean regimes. Besides, as Edwards (1986) argues, the social meanings of absenteeism are connected to the system of control in the labour process and the latter behaviour can only be understood only by relating it to the pattern of control in which it takes place (p.261).

Fichman stresses that absence has no meaning without its concept of attendance. Fichman goes on and suggests, "absence exists only as it is defined by the organization and its relationship with the employee" (see Acroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.76). This author sets

the territory for stressing questions whether absenteeism has meaning without, not only the concept of attendance, but also the social meanings of attendance and the location of this behaviour within the labour process. As Edwards (1986, p.278) reports: “Workplace behaviour does not come in pre-packaged forms such as absenteeism...but is the product of the wider social relations governing work”. Patton (2011, 2005) suggests that research on attendance should move beyond treating absenteeism as a simple lack of presence, and examine closely the social expectations surrounding the issue. As this thesis adds, there is a necessity to examine more closely the links between attendance control and the triadic model of the labour process, in order to understand the manifestations of this behaviour within the employment relationship and particular shop floor regimes.

Edwards and Scullion (1982) suggest that absenteeism represents a denial to accept managerial logic for minimization of labour costs and retention of control over the labour process. Nevertheless, this is not always the case. Even within capitalism, not all actions are directly linked to a pattern of control and resistance. Indeed, absenteeism should not always be perceived as a form of resistance. It remains true that people go absent for different reasons (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.25). Blyton and Turnbull (2004), similarly to Edwards and Whitston (1993), argue that employees rarely see absence as a tactic of resistance. Customarily, such behaviour is adopted as a mechanism to relieve tension and frustration with a workplace incident, rather an attempt to change the situation. For example, in Edwards and Scullion’s (1982) case study on clothing factories, absenteeism did not directly challenge managerial control and the behaviour was not expressed as direct resistance. Therefore, as Edwards and Scullion (1982) note, there is no evidence for a linear relationship between absence frequency and managerial control (p.130), while, as Edwards (1986) reports, employees are not using absenteeism “as a way of getting back to the management” (p.256). Although it remains true that absence is a response to the system of control, the social meaning of attendance the social meanings of attendance depend on the social relations of work.

However, one should not turn to the other extreme, usually found in post-Foucauldian views, where absenteeism is rarely perceived or examined as a form of resistance. Absenteeism does indeed reflect a sort of discontent towards the employer, holding though qualitatively different meanings for those involved (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). In Edwards and Scullion’s (1982) study, although absenteeism was not a form of direct resistance it still reflected a clash of interest. Hence, overall, there are strong grounds for

non-attendance to be perceived as a manifestation of conflict, yet this has limited implications for the shop floor relations (Edwards, 1986, p.256). As Edwards (1986) suggests, the interest should not be whether there is a direct connection between control and resistance, or control and consent. What it is important to explore are the conditions under which these relations emerge, in order to understand the complex connections in the new labour process model - control, resistance, consent, accommodation. (Thompson and Newsome, 2004).

This gives weight to Gorrfried's concluding proposition that research should turn to micro-levels (shop floors), which are different to the classic studies on manufacturing and Fordism regimes, and be more focused in post-Fordist production processes. This thesis takes the proposition further, by exploring a service system- food retailing - which has similarities to lean-production regimes in the logic of control application, as well as to the organization of work. The supermarket floor today, and specifically the checkout function, is at the core of the service production in supermarkets (Soares, 2001). Absence creates bottlenecks on this virtual 'assembly line' of services (Taylor et al., 2010), similar to the production floor (Beynon, 1984; Blumenfeld and Inman, 2009; Cohen, 2012).

John and Nicholson (1982) argue "absence means different things to different people in different types of different situations" (in Goodman and Atkin, 1984, p.288). This, in correlation to Kristensen's (1991) (in Johns, 1997, p.138) findings that 'Taylorized' job designs reveal higher level of absenteeism, as well as the argument suggesting the importance of workplace attendance in lean regimes (Taylor et al, 2010), it is suggested that non-attendance is considered as a crucial negative event for grocers, leading to costs and negative consequences. As other authors conclude, "[attendance] is a key ingredient in the search for increased productivity and the competitive advantage" (Huczynski and Fitzpatrick, 1989, p.26). This argument corresponds to the lean environment of the food retail organization, where cost is a crucial factor. Additionally, the strong competitive environment of food retailing is possible to impact on the managers' view on attendance. Edwards and Whitston (1993) note that in the case of Multiplex, attendance had received increasing attention, at all levels of the management. As Edwards and Whitston (1993) found, "there was a general tightening of attendance control and associated labour discipline" (p.66), whereas the responsibility was increasingly put on the line managers shoulders, under the direct supervision of the personnel specialists. This focus on

attendance control in Multiplex, similarly to food retailing, was driven by the associated costs of absence behaviour and the strong competitive pressures in the market.

Martocchio (1992) reports that there is abundant evidence showing that absenteeism produces significant costs, affecting the bottom line (Kocakülâh et al., 2009). Similarly, MacLean (2008) reports that high levels of absence are costly and disruptive. Indeed, a vast amount of research has been developed around the financial costs accompanied with this behaviour (Bevan et al., 2004; Kocakülâh et al., 2009). Nevertheless, absenteeism does not only generate financial costs, but it has been correlated with the emergence of several issues for the organizations that are not directly observable. Authors have provided a division between direct and indirect costs, while Bevan and Hayday (2001) (in Evans and Walters, 2002, p.13) have suggested a third category characterized as “absence management costs”.

The lean retailing system, the pressure for lower costs, as the outcome of the intense competition on prices, as well as the ‘low road strategy’ followed by grocers, makes absenteeism a costly behaviour for these organizations, hence a problem which needs to be managed. Besides, as Edwards and Whiston (1993) suggest, absence emerges as a problem for managers when it appears to generate financial costs. Yet this is a rigorous managerial view on absenteeism. Edwards and Scullion (1984) argue that only limited attention has been given to the social meanings of absenteeism and its place within a pattern of employee-employer relations has hardly been explored. Nevertheless, industrial sociologists have indeed discussed the manifestation of absence as an expression of industrial conflict, as well as the consent making within the workplace, suggesting the organization of consent the negotiation of order on the shop floor (Edwards and Whitston, 1993). Yet, limited research has been concerned about these relationships on the food retail shop floor, where, as the political economy analysis shows, the competitive pressures and the leaner regime impact on the organization of work bring the management of attendance to the forefront.

As has already been noted non-attendance has been characterized as a classic resistance strategy or using Collinson’s (1994) terminology, “a resistance through distance”, where workers try to escape the demands of the management by making themselves distant, either physically and/or symbolically, from the organization. Yet, as Williams (2014, p.297) argues, “the extent to which absenteeism can be conceptualized as a form of labour conflict often depends on the context in which it occurs”. Williams suggests that research often

neglected the structural dynamics that affect attendance decisions. This has not been evidenced in the working regime of food retailing. In addition, one should not neglect the accommodative approach to attendance management and therefore the links between consent and attendance (Edwards and Whiston, 1993, Burawoy, 1978). Limited research has examined attendance manifestations in the food retail sector (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002), whereas the focus of those who have been interested in this area was mainly driven by a practical notice and adopted a managerial, rather than a sociological interest to attendance. Hence, limited theorization of attendance exists in the food retail regime, whereas the theoretical framework of attendance for the contemporary workplace, through an industrial relations prism, is still underdeveloped. Although the manifestation of (non)attendance as conflict expression has received attention within the literature (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; P. K Edwards, 1990; P. K. Edwards and Whitston, 1993) this area remains unexplored within the food retail sector.

Hyman's (1989b) reports that absenteeism is an individual form of industrial conflict. Similarly, Hebdon and Noh (2013) develop a framework, within which they conceptualize different forms of conflict, locating non-attendance as an individual action of contestation. Even though, such arguments are today universally accepted in industrial sociology literature, some authors have indirectly challenged it. Particularly, Turnbull and Sapsford (1992) provide a thorough analysis on unorganized conflict, arguing though that the line between organized and unorganized conflict cannot always be defined (p.292). The latter authors propose that absenteeism might not always be an individual act, but a behaviour emerging through on a collective act. A similar argument is made by Cook (1990) who describes absenteeism as the "silent strike" (in Blyton and Turnbull, 2004, p.353). Similarly Belanger and Edwards (2013, p.21) argue, "In the front-line service work there are many facets of the dynamics of control and contestation that are not accounted for with a binary and simple distinction between the individual and collective".

Edwards (1986) suggest that the relationship between strikes and absenteeism, as alternatives, is often questionable, while similarly, Godard (2011, p.300) questions Sapsford and Turnbull's (1994) 'balloon hypothesis', which suggests that if you squeeze a balloon at one place, it expands at others. This metaphor clearly states that employees have alternatives to the way they express their conflict, either those are strikes- organized act or absenteeism – unorganized act. Hebdon and Noh (2013) describe the balloon hypothesis noting, "the reduction of conflict expression is likely to lead to a corresponding increase in

other manifestation of workplace conflict” (p.35). However, this infers an ‘inverse functionalism’. It is different to argue that one form of conflict is not effective, hence leads employees to adopt an alternative tactics, whereas it is different to suggest that the overall level of conflict will not decline and actions of resistance will always be present. If that was the case, workers would be less likely to engage in conflict if their ‘weapons’ were ineffective. On the contrary, Hebdon and Noh (2013) support the complementary iceberg hypothesis, which suggests that when any form of industrial conflict occurs, it induces corresponding increases in other forms of workplace conflict demonstrating that collective and individual actions go together. The authors take the discussion a step further, locating the expression and development of industrial conflict in a build-up process that starts from various forms of conflict expression, and if the problems persist this could lead to softer forms of collective action and finally to organized collective actions and strikes (see Hebdon and Noh, 2013, p.38)

The question whether absenteeism is an individual action or an ‘unofficial strike’ is not the subject of this research. What is vital to understand it that absenteeism is as significant as strikes, due to the disruptions in the business operations (Edwards, 1986, Johns, 1997, Taylor et al., 2010). Taylor et al. (2010), drawing on Smith’s (2006) argument for ‘double indeterminacy of labour power’ note that employers should realize that “the employees’ potential to create value is predicated upon their actual attendance” (p.273). Hence, despite the argument that going absent may not be as rational as strikes, as it brings only temporary relief, and it is doubtful whether it can change the work situation or the frontier of control (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004, p.358), the social meanings of attendance within the food retail working regime are still underexplored. Besides, as Edwards and Scullion (1982) suggest, the different forms of conflict, ranging from absenteeism to strikes, have to be understood in the context of the specific control structures, hence the ‘frontier of control’ of which they are a part (Watson, 2003, p.231). Edwards and Scullion (1982) also argue that the notion of control over the labour process is a crucial starting point in the analysis of conflict (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, p.9), while Burawoy (1979) reports that a close attention in the labour process is required. Indeed a close analysis of the labour process is required within the particular regime of food retailing, not only to conceptualize attendance as conflict, but also to understand the social meanings of this behaviour and the relationship between control and consent.

Conflict is indeed a product of a particular organization of work. This implies that perceiving absenteeism simply as a form of conflict is a misconception. Edwards and Scullion (1982, p.110-111) report that going absent is a general response to the continuous demands of work. Yet this is still not a universal response. As it is noted, workers have different needs to take time off, which is transformed to the degree of control over their work. Hence, the context and setting within which this behaviour emerges, as well as the frontier of control (Collinson, 1994), need to be scrutinized in order to understand what attendance behaviour reflects (Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

Resistance in supermarkets is not a completely unexplored area. Soares (2001) refers to silent rebellions and describes the way supermarket cashiers resist. He reports, “Cashiers are not objects, but real subjects who struggle daily to accomplish their work. *Cashiers resist*” [emphasis added] (p.113). Soare’s (2001) research evidences that resistance is embedded in food retailing. However, resistance in Soare’s (2001) research was not found to be linked to the managerial control. Soares was more focused on emotional labour and employees’ resistance to customers, neglecting, to an extent, the shop floor social relations, and the wage-effort bargain. Interestingly Soares (2001) continues to say that although resistance can be collective, conflict is mainly expressed through unorganized and informal means. In particular, he refers to acts such as solidarity, humour, behaviour that comes in contradiction with the organizational rules, such as chewing gum or eating candy as commonly used by cashiers. Finally, Soares finds that cashiers use lateness and absence as resistance strategies. Nevertheless, what is missing from the latter research is the concept of consent within the labour process. The latter author conceptualizes resistance, but fails to recognize consent making. Additionally the line managers’ role in managing attendance within this regime is still a grey research area, and therefore one that requires more attention. Finally, to take the argument a step further, it is important to explain attendance manifestations within the labour process, both as a conflict expression, as well as consent.

Some authors have discussed the connections between industrial conflict and the nature of work in food retailing. Blyton and Turnbull (2004), for instance, present examples of conflict in such so-called ‘donkey jobs’, which are repetitive, monotonous and isolated. Specifically, the latter authors refer to the absence of trade unions in such a regime, suggesting that this leaves no alternatives to employees than to use informal and unorganized forms of conflict such as turnover, absenteeism, pilfering and so on. Similarly, LaNuez and Jermier (1994) found that workers used sabotage to control their working time

and absenteeism was perceived as a form of sabotage. These come in agreement with Gottfried's (1994) conclusion, that in a society that is structured by antagonistic social relationships, such as the food retail shop floor, resistance occurs as part of the everyday working life.

Nonetheless, despite the argument that in such repetitive jobs absence and sickness are used as conflict expression forms and usually used as levers of releasing tension and frustration at work (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004), others' research shows that absenteeism is rarely perceived by employees as a spontaneous conflict expression. For example, Edwards and Scullion (1982) in their case on the clothing company find that absenteeism was more linked to escaping the pressures of work with female employees acting less spontaneously. This gives weight to the argument, pointing that "most workers attend to work for most of the time" (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, p.107). In the same vein, Nicholson (1977, p.242) similarly reports that "most people, most of the time, are on automatic pilot to attend regularly", while Edwards and Whitston (1993, p.55) found that employees perceived attendance at work as a routine and an 'everyday thing' and suggested that absence was not a major issue for most employees. Taylor et al (2010, p. 282) report that, 'many employees were dragging themselves into work when sick, fearful...of losing their job' and conclude that 'it is true that regularity of attendance has characterised workers' behaviour, whether through habit, fear of sanction or ingrained socialisation'. This stresses questions that are related to Burawoy's (1979) discussion on consent within the labour process. How workers perceive attendance and how they are persuaded to attend for work regularly is still a contemporary aspect within the labour process, which needs to be understood within the structures of control that attendance takes place and the effort-bargain (Edwards and Whitston, 1993).

Edwards and Whitston (1989) do not find any attendance problems in retail and suggest that despite the expectations for non-attendance as an outcome of the monotonous job, this was not the point. Edwards and Whitston (1989) suggest that this happens because most of the stores in the sample examined had long-standing sick pay schemes that were important in retaining staff and, furthermore, the problem of absence was mainly addressed with the use of part-time employees, who are found as willing to tolerate the monotonous job. Hence, sick pay and part-time employees were used as sophisticated control systems by retailers to address absence and hence, not allowing employees express their conflict through such an action, rather a subordination and consent within this regime is evident.

Yet this is not something that is clearly evidenced in food retailing *per se*. In Dunn and Wilkinson's (2002) research organizations try to monitor absence through statistics and budgeting, with line managers giving though little attention to numbers. Yet, the authors do not explain the meanings of absence for employees, and are more interested in how organizations try to control it.

Additionally, Pollert (1981) (in Edwards, 1986, p.267) finds that absenteeism is more reflecting to the pressures of work, thus it is acting more like a coping mechanism, than conflict. Bycio (1992) similarly concludes that absenteeism acts as a mechanism that helps employees to deal with stress, resulting in a more committed and high performing workforce. In addition, Edwards and Whitston (1993) highlight that extra-working pressures are important in employees' decisions not to attend and that these influences are more important than work pressures. For example, they suggest that in the case of British Rail, absence could often reflect literal tiredness, as the result of the high levels of overtime work. Therefore, domestic needs and outside work circumstances are indeed influencing the employees' attendance behaviour. However, this issue has to be analysed in more detail within the feminized, and, of course, contested terrain of the food retail shop floor.

Edwards and Whitston (1993, p.53) also note that 'family and domestic duties were at least as important as frustration with the job itself'. Feminist scholars' report though qualitative differences between men's and women's experiences, presenting women engaging in less visible acts of resistance which are rooted in everyday life (Gottfried, 1994, p.108). Considering then the fact, that food retailing is a female dominated job, or as Soares (2001) calls it 'a pink collar job', it is important to investigate the patterns of attendance of female workers on the supermarket shop floor through two different spectrums. The characteristics of the working regime and the 'frontier of control', as already argued, are indeed affecting the employment relationship. However, what is happening outside the working life is also necessary to be examined in order to answer whether (non)attendance is more an endeavour to balance the different roles of the female employees (mother, wife, employee and so on), rather than a conflict expression.

As Edwards (1986) reports, men, and women join workplaces having different backgrounds and expectations, as well as different obligations outside the workplace. Therefore, gender status takes particular significance in specific workplaces (Edwards, 1986, p.280), such as food retailing, a fact that is also recognized by Edwards and Whitston (1989). Hence, gender plays an important role in this research, regarding the employees'

attendance decisions, considering the domination of the workplace by female workers. Although gender is not the focus of the thesis, it is still an important variable. Moreover, the fact that students are presented as a high proportion of the workforce might similarly generate conflict of interest. Besides, as Edwards (1986) suggests, the external influences to work, and the impact on absence decisions, have to be interpreted in action.

Finally, following Edwards (2010, 2007, 1994) argument, there is a requirement to examine these issues across different countries because as he suggests, when different workplaces in different countries are compared one can be confident that not accidental aspects of a particular case are being explored. Therefore, this research provides a comparison between UK and Cyprus supermarkets. The rationale of the comparison between the two countries is based upon a concern to compare the employment practices of the supermarkets within two EU countries with similar regulatory frameworks that experience an era of austerity. Turning back to the argument that different workplaces, organizations and industries have different patterns of control and conflict, as well as distinct attendance cultures, it is questioned whether the ‘Wal-Martization’ trend has implications both on the ‘frontier of control’, and the way attendance is manifested within the labour process.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how attendance is manifested within the labour process. It provided a discussion on the labour process theory; it recognized the triadic model of the labour process and suggested the contested employment relationship under capitalism. It has then briefly discussed the means of control, drawing on classic theories, and provided a discussion regarding the links between control, resistance and consent and the changing shape of industrial conflict. The last section of this chapter discussed the different meanings of attendance, whilst it emphasized to the contestation of the employment relationship and the different forms of industrial conflict, as well as the consensual approach towards attendance management and the negotiation of order on the shop floor.

Next, the thesis conceptualizes the line managers’ role in managing attendance, and stresses questions regarding their authority and discretion in absence management. Given the crucial role of these actors in managing and controlling attendance, as well as in negotiating order (Edwards and Whitston, 1989; 1993), this area requires further attention.

4. Conceptualizing the line managers' role in managing attendance at work

This chapter discusses the role of line managers in managing attendance at work. To do so, it brings together the classic writings on the 'supervisor' with the more contemporary literature regarding the line managers' involvement in HR. The chapter sets the basis for a sociological analysis, stressing the need to modernize the classic industrial sociologists' debates regarding the line managers'/supervisors' involvement in the employment relationship, and particularly in attendance management. It first defines the line manager as the actor who engages in a general management role and interacts directly with the front-line employees, but have more responsibilities than just supervising. Then it discusses the devolution of HR responsibilities to the line, and particularly their role in managing attendance. It stresses issues regarding the 'supervisory problem', the line managers' involvement in attendance and absence management, and discusses their authority and discretion within this process.

4.1 Defining the line manager

Townsend (2014) argues that authors discuss the line managers' experience, without, though, offering an explicit definition of who line managers might be. Additionally, different terms are used interchangeably in the literature to describe the line managers' function. Specifically, terms such as front-line managers, supervisors, and middle managers signify the role of the line manager in the contemporary business environment (Child and Partridge, 1982; Currie and Procter, 2001; Hales, 2005; McConville and Holden, 1999; Redman and Wilkinson, 2009). The term 'line manager' is used in this thesis to describe the front line managers on the supermarket shop floor, as they are those who generally have the responsibility to deliver HRM to the greatest number of employees (Townsend, 2014, p. 159)

Some of the terms used by authors do not correspond to the same level of authority. For example, Lowe (1992) makes a distinction between line managers and line supervisors, reporting that only the former group has authority to take decisions that affect their subordinates. A classic text on industrial sociology, discusses the different levels of supervisory hierarchy, showing that there are different levels of authority on the front-line, and that the first-line supervisor sits at the lower level of authority, as the man who is involved in a daily face-to-face contact with the men (Miller and Form, 1964, p.205). Even though, this work is not current, it shows that some of the authors' findings are similar to

contemporary research. For instance, similar to Miller and Form (1964), Renwick and MacNeil (2002) note that a distinction can be made between line managers and supervisors. Yet, they also report that front-line managers and supervisors have a key role to play in the day-to-day HRM delivery. A similar distinction is made by post-industrial authors, who stress that foremen and supervisors have different roles within the factory (Beynon, 1984; Patten, 1968; Thurley et al., 1973), whereas only the supervisors progress to front-line managers, and claim a position within the management team as the classic writings of Child and Partridge (1982) suggest. Likewise, Hales (2005, p.473) also attempts to clarify whether supervisors and line managers have different roles and responsibilities. He argues that a great responsibility has been delegated to the front-line managers, and suggests that their role altered from the traditional supervising to team leaders and front-line managers.

Nevertheless, the distinction between these roles is not universal in the research. Nichols and Beynon (1977) for example, recognize that the supervisor is a front-line manager, and suggest that no matter what title is used to describe this position, they are still members of the management, indicating that they hold managerial authority. Thurley et al. (1973, p.26) report that 200 different job titles were found for people at supervisory levels, who, though, seem to have some degree of authority over others, and stand between the management and the workers. Similarly, Storey (1992) finds that managers themselves do not believe that the front-line manager role is different to the traditional supervisory role and describe it by using the phrase: “a rose by any other name is still a rose” (p.229). Finally, it is suggested that the changes in the organizational design and the flatter organizational structures resulted in the integration of the managerial lines, whereas higher authority was devolved to lower management levels (Renwick, 2009; Renwick and MacNeil, 2002). However, industrial sociologists hold a different view. For example, Thurley et al. (1973, p.8) report that the changes in the organizational structures had significant implications for supervisors, raising issues with foreman’s regarding their authority. More discussion on the “supervisory problem” follows later in this chapter.

In this research, the term ‘line manager’ is adopted to identify those leading the grocery retailing shop floor. As MacNeil (2003, p.294) argues, although great distinctions were made between supervisors and front-line managers, the main interest is on the term ‘line manager’ and his/her role in not just being a functional specialist, but a business manager (Storey, 1992). Therefore, in this study, similarly to Legge (1995), line managers are

defined as the front-level managers who engage in a general management role, instead of having special responsibilities on a specific area. Additionally, this research defines line managers as those who interact directly with the front-line employees, but have more responsibilities than just supervising (CIPD, 2010; Renwick, 2009), while similarly Hales (2005) describes front-line managers as those who lie at the first level of the managerial hierarchy, and to whom non-managerial employees report.

4.2 The devolution of HRM to the line: a research agenda

The thesis so far has discussed the different terminology found in literature and clarified that the term 'line manager' will be used in this research. However, following Hales contribution, this research aims to investigate what line managers do, why, and how they do it (Hales, 2001b, 1999), rather than debate a priori of who the line managers really are (Hales, 1986, p.90). However, the latter is not completely neglected. It is crucial to note that line managers can be described as 'mini managers' on the line (Lowe, 1992, p.159). As Storey (1992, p.219) suggests the role is moving towards a 'mini manager model', which involves a broader set of responsibilities for supervisors, higher authority, higher pay and status, more training, careful selection for those people entering or promoted to the role, and enhanced competencies. Additionally, Hales has developed an extensive discussion over the years aiming to identify what managers do, including line managers. He comes to a conclusion that managers at different levels carry similar responsibilities, which include HRM activities, whilst he argues that they emphasize to four main activities; namely: the day-to-day people management, the management of information, the day-to-day monitoring of work practices, and non-managerial activities such as assisting with technical work (Hales, 2001a, see 2001b, p.51, 1986)

The line managers' role has been expanded since the 1980s, and has become more managerial (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2010). A consistent theme found in the HRM literature is the devolution of HR responsibilities to the line (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007; Teague and Roche, 2012). In other words, the role of line managers is not just incorporating technical responsibilities, but it has been expanded with 'people responsibilities' (Lowe, 1992, p.148). Yet, the revision of the historical development of the supervisory role shows that line managers always had some responsibility in people management, and their attention shifted from production to business (Child and Partridge, 1982; Cunningham and Hyman, 1995; Lowe, 1992; McConville, 2006; Patten, 1968), with HRM consisting of another task added into their role (McConville, 2006). Thurley et al.

(1973) report that one of the most important functions controlled by the European foreman in the 19th and 20th century was people management. However, the late 20th century, evidenced the development of the staff departments, and personnel specialists became members of the top management, displacing supervisors from the management team, and taking over their power and authority in managing people, leaving them standing between management and labour.

Nonetheless, today the trend has changed again and the authority and power in managing people has been devolved back to the line. Particularly, since the early 1990s, there seems to be a tendency in the UK business environment for greater involvement of line managers in HRM. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this is not found to be universal across the European markets, as in different countries and in different sectors, there is a greater or a lesser propensity to share HR responsibilities between HR and the line (Brewster et al., 2004; Hutchinson and Wood, 1995; Larsen and Brewster, 2003; Livian and Burgoyne, 1997). For example, Hutchinson and Wood (1995) report that in some countries, such as Sweden, a higher involvement of line managers in HRM is evidenced. In these contexts, the line managers enjoy higher authority, and hold great responsibilities in managing people, while personnel department fulfils different roles. In Denmark, for instance, personnel specialists are internal consultants, while in Sweden the staff department moved towards a consultancy-type function. Hutchinson and Wood (1995) suggest that such differences have remarkable impact on line managers' involvement in HRM.

Additionally, Hales (2001b) criticizes the arguments related to the disappearing front-line management position. Several supporters of the new managerial thesis discussed the replacement of this level of management by self-managed teams, to reflect flatter managerial hierarchies and less bureaucratic control. However, as the author suggests the decentralization of power, the emphasis on empowerment, and the transition to post-bureaucratic organization are exaggerated, and there is little change on the line managers' role. As Hales (2001b, p.54) notes, "the reports of the death of the manager are a trifle premature". Therefore, despite the discussion regarding the flatter organizational structure, line managers are still part of the organization of work and have an active role in managing people.

Indeed, literature that is more recent indicates the importance of line managers as HRM ambassadors, and a range of studies support their significant role in HRM, acknowledging that HR cannot be restricted to specialists (Brandl et al., 2009). Thornhill and Saunders

(1998a) report that everyone across the managerial pyramid (top, middle and junior managers) act as protagonists to put HRM into action within the organisation, while similarly Poole (1990) suggests that “HRM involves all managerial personnel, and especially line managers” (in Lowe, 1992, p.148). Therefore, this strategic response may be implemented through line managers’ involvement in HRM, as they are the managers closer to the employees, and they may impact on them directly (Brandl et al., 2009, p.194). As Carls (2009, p.88) puts it, line managers are expected to be the contact person for all sorts of problems. Hence, as Guest (1987, p.519) reports ‘for HRM is to be taken seriously, personnel managers should give it away’ (McGuire et al., 2008, p.74)

Renwick (2009) reports that nowadays the involvement of line managers in HRM is a common practise, and it is perceived as an obvious core part of an HRM approach to the employment relationship. This follows Legge’s (1989, p.28) famous comment, that ‘*HRM is vested in line management*’ [emphasis added], whereas according to Hope-Hailey et al. (1997), HR specialists’ work should be devolved to line managers, because since people are the crucial ingredient to strategy implementation, then HRM is too important to be left on personnel specialists’ hands (Storey, 2001, p.7).

Storey (1992) has long recognized that line managers hold responsibilities in managing people. He reports that in both personnel management and HRM models, line managers are important in managing people, yet with a different focus. Specifically, in the former the perception is that specialists’ responsibilities are devolved and carried by line managers, with a general perception that all managers manage people, and specialist work has to be implemented by line managers. Yet, the latter model recognizes line managers as business partners who act appropriately and proactively in the use of the HR in the business unit, with personnel policies being an integral part of the HR strategy. This chapter will not analyze in detail the difference between HRM and personnel management, neither will it discuss in more detail the line managers’ role in relation to strategy, as this is placed to different research interests than those found in this research. What should be emphasized here is that line managers’ responsibilities are not anymore just restricted in monitoring and organizing production, but they now have a vital role to play in managing people (Lowe, 1992). Nonetheless, these changes do not come from a formal re-division of HR responsibilities between specialists and line managers, but they arise due to the changes in manufacturing processes and the labour process in general. An assertive attitude is evidenced by line managers towards personnel management, with many of them

demonstrating an attempt to switch from the 'traditional supervisor' status to become front-line managers, and embody a new management style that includes people responsibilities. Finally, Clark's (1993) findings should also be cited, indicating that technical change has also led line managers to become more involved in employee relations issues.

However, the latter argument seems to be inconsistent when someone embraces the discussion on the classic writings of the Marxist school in industrial relations. To be more specific, despite the fact that Marx's model, which explains how the capitalistic society operates, has supervision as a central theme (Strangleman and Warren, 2008, p.183), Edwards (1979) suggests that the technical advancement that led to the adoption of technical control, comes to a contradiction to Clark's findings. This is found in Child and Partridge (1982) research, who suggest that Taylorism and Scientific Management challenged the supervisory role with the introduction of specialist departments. Similarly, the bureaucratic system of control, which followed and co-existed to the technical change has affected the supervisory role, and specifically as Gourdner (1960) (in Hirszowicz, 1985, p.116) suggests: "increased bureaucratization contributes to the limitation of supervisory power". Similarly, Hales (2001a), who analyses the classic approach to the work organization, argues that the centralization of planning and control, resulted in the shortage of the supervisors' role, who were left responsible to enforce rules and standards set from above. Therefore, the role of the supervisor is fragmented 'echoing Taylor's notion of 'functional foremanship', as Hales notes (p.54). Similarly, there is the assumption in the literature that supervisors are superseded by bureaucratic and technical controls, hence the management process is proceeding without the personal power of the supervisor (Edwards, 1979). Thus, these arguments support those authors' views, who have discussed the end of the supervisor's role (Braverman, 1974; Child and Partridge, 1982; Patten, 1968; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992).

These arguments are coming from the industrial era, with a focus on the assembly line and Fordism. However, it would be a mistake to suggest they are not applicable in the present. Food retailing is a neo-Tayloristic working environment and it is important to understand whether the advanced technology, the leaner work organization, and the supermarket working regime in general impact on the line managers' authority and their perceptions of responsibility towards managing attendance to work. Clark (1993) concludes that controls need to be introduced to ensure HR issues and these should be taken seriously. Hence, based on Thurley et al.'s (1973; 28) supposition that in the case of a large retail

organization, supervisors may be entirely isolated or integrated within management control systems, it is important here to understand the line managers' role within particular control systems, in order to explain their role in the labour process and particularly in managing attendance to work.

Saying that, it should not be assumed that such an issue has been completely neglected by authors. For example, Grugulis et al. (2011b), examining the leadership in UK supermarkets, report that the bureaucratic forms of control are still strong, resulting in the presence of the old-fashion supervisor, rather than the inspirational leader. They find increasing limitations and constraints over the store managers' and the line managers' discretion in managing people. Particularly, they discuss the impact on line managers' work, which is filtered through the advanced technology, the close monitoring, and the pre-set leadership behavior with formal HR practices, templates, and detailed systems, being in place, and thus do not allow them to develop their own leadership style. The authors also report that "the freedoms enjoyed by the supermarket managers were minor and illicit" (p.203), they still though developed their small discretionary spaces (Grugulis et al. (2011b). Storey et al (1997) discussing control for managers in one major supermarket note that it has become "more considered, more sophisticated and perhaps more subtle; it has, in short, been rationalized and routinized" (in Lloyd and Payne, 2014, p.468). These come in agreement with others' conclusions, who discuss the decentralization of authority and the centralized control and decision making by the Head office (Bolton and Houlihan, 2010; Freathy and Sparks, 1995; Hales, 2001a). These findings are crucial for this thesis, as evidences are provided for the supermarket shop floor operating under 'neo-Taylorism', and show that line managers have limited authority in HR initiatives, including attendance management. Grugulis et al. (2011b) conclude that academic research lacks to distinguish between the rhetorical flourishes and the real-world job designs of the managers' role. This study explores the line managers' role in managing attendance, aiming to identify the dynamics that impact on the latter, and to develop a real-world picture of the day-to-day managerial actions within this process within the supermarket shop floor regime.

Thurley and Hamblin (1963) (in Child and Partridge, 1982, p.12) argue that in different work situations, there is a significant variation in supervisors' tasks and activities, whilst it is argued here that limited research has examined the line managers' role in the food retail sector. According to Child and Partridge (1982, p.13–14), "it would be not fruitful to generalize about supervisors, away from the situations in which they work and research

should be sensitive to the situation of work and to each supervisor's position". Townsend (2014) concludes that line managers are not homogenous and notes that "the context in which we speak of line management becomes very important" (p.156). As Edwards (1994) argues, attention needs to be given towards the key actors to understand how work has been organized and controlled. Therefore, a closer analysis of the line managers' role in managing attendance is required, in order to understand how attendance is managed on the food retail shop floor.

4.3 The supervisory problem: HRM devolving in practice

McGovern et al (1997) try to explain what devolution means in practice and characterize line managers as a 'delivery mechanism' for HR practices. This thesis argues that this is an unsuitable term to use. To be more specific, in this research the focus is not to just examine whether line managers are mechanically delivering absence policies. The thesis argues that characterizing line managers as mechanisms removes their discretion, and presents them as passively following specialist directions. In other words, line managers should not be viewed as "unimportant transmitters of orders from the top" (Levertracy, 1987; 336). Child and Partridge (1982) suggest that research on supervisors should regard their authority and influence over decisions. A central theme in contemporary literature is the 'powerlessness' of front-line managers, the lack of real autonomy for this role, and the competing demands emerging from senior managers, employees, as well as customers (Lloyd and Payne, 2014).

This thesis investigates the discretionary elements of the line managers' role in managing attendance to work, and goes beyond the research that plainly acknowledges their involvement in absence management policies, as well as the managerial literature that aims to provide guidelines to line managers on how to manage attendance properly. In other words, this study does not only examine whether line managers are involved in attendance policies by observing their actions, but the aim is also to understand their perceptions over the reasons for the employees' decision to go absent, and their authority, discretion, and role in influencing this behaviour. Using the term authority is not just referring to the formal power devolved to line managers to manage such issue, but also reflects the informal accommodations and the practices adopted by them. Edwards and Whitston (1993) find that in the case of British Rail, managers were trying to control absence through informal means, whereas the strict disciplinary approach, which was governed through the formal policy, was targeting the minority of 'bad attenders'. They conclude that the British Rail management had to rely on negotiation to obtain worker compliance a

organize consent and note that ‘labour relations on the railways have traditionally been marked by a distinct balance of conflict and accommodation’ (p.129).

The discussion on the supervisors’ authority in people management is one that goes back to the 20th century, when in popular writings on supervision this was a persistent theme, emphasizing the lack of authority to the position (Child and Partridge, 1982; Lowe, 1992; Patten, 1968). Yet, the classic literature on supervisory and particular the supervisor’s problem is biased to the manufacturing situation, while other contexts such as services are neglected (Thurley et al., 1973). However, it is argued here that the traditional ‘supervisory problem’, indicating supervisors as being the men in the middle (Child and Partridge, 1982; Lowe, 1992), is not dead, but it has just changed its form and it has been transferred to situations other than manufacturing. This is evident to the role ambiguity, and role conflict attached to the line managers’ work (Gilbert et al., 2011; Hutchinson and Wood, 1995; Sanders and Frenkel, 2011). It is important here to describe what these terms mean, and how they are defined in the literature, in order to understand how the ambiguity and role conflict affect the line managers’ role. Gilbert et al. (2011, p.551) adopting Khan et al.’s (1964) definition, explains the HR role ambiguity as an uncertainty about line managers’ activities and responsibilities in HR. In the same paper, role conflict is defined as the incompatibility in expectations towards the behavior of a person in his/her role (Newton and Keenan, 1987 in Gilbert et al., 2011. p.551).

Roethlisberger (1945) described the foreman as a ‘master and victim of double talk’, specifying the role conflict these managers experienced (in Patten, 1968, p.14). Industrial sociologists have developed a significant amount of literature around the supervisor’s role conflict, and discussed them as being ‘trapped’ as a middle class worker between labour and management. Hirszowicz (1985, p.100) provides a clear description of the ‘man in the middle’ problem. He argues that foremen are caught between two different social and organizational structures. On the one hand, they interact on a daily basis with the workers they supervise, and on the other hand, they are part of the management team, receiving orders from their superiors, and experience pressures to act in favour of the management. McConville and Holden (1999) argue that any conflicts between employers and employees are today supposed to be managed by the line manager, in contradiction to the past where specialists played the role of the negotiator. Lloyd and Payne (2014) find that managers are highly constrained by the centralized control applied by head office, particularly for issues related to people management, and similarly to Bolton and Houlihan (2010), the former

authors suggest that café managers had to mediate between the head office and their staff. In the same vein Carter et al. (2014) discuss the conflict between front-line managers with both the employees and their superiors, suggesting that the former actors adopted contradictory positions. Thus, line managers ‘stuck in the middle’, and it is well understood they stand between the conflicting demands of the different groups they are interacting with. They have to keep a cooperation with their subordinates, who are not necessarily identify with the organization, and at the same time meet the top management requirements, to act in the interest of the firm. In other words, as Fletcher (1969) puts it, ‘the supervisors are the agents of capital...while simultaneously appear to be as much the victims of capital as those they supervise’ (in Delbridge and Lowe, 1997; 409).

Nichols and Beynon (1977) argue that the supervisors are subject to the forces of deskilling, bureaucratic control, and surveillance through technology, whilst they are expected to be bureaucrats with high responsibilities, but are still monitored by managers. Similarly, Rose et al. (1987) report arguments for deskilling and degradation of the supervisory work, as the outcomes of the bureaucratic forms of control, which respectively result into the increase of number of supervisors, whose sole responsibility is to implement rules and procedures handed down by senior managers. Similarly, Carter et al. (2014) conclude that the line managers’ power over labour is less independent and more clearly subject to control from above. Therefore, the role indeed suffers from ambiguity and extremely conflicting situations for supervisors, who struggle to maintain a professional identity, an escalating problem throughout the decades (Hirszowicz, 1985; Hutchinson and Wood, 1995). Roethlisberger (1965), 20 years after his classic article, argues that “there is more conflict at the foreman level now than there was 20 years ago...but [now] is probably better managed” (in Patten, 1968, p.14-15). However, this is not an unexplored theme in contemporary research, as more recent writings have examined the supervisory issue. Delbridge and Lowe (1997) examine the nature of supervision, and the role of supervisors/line managers in contemporary manufacturing, concluding that the argument for the death of the supervisory position is exaggerated, whereas they emphasize the importance of supervisors as social actors. In the same way, Robson’s (2008) study, reveals some ambiguity over line managers’ responsibilities in managing absence, with obvious differences between rhetoric and reality, while Carter et al. (2014) discuss the changes in the labour process within the civil service, the reconfiguration of superiory role and the consequent weakening of the front-line managers’ ties with labour and the generation of conflict. Carter et al. (2014) discuss the attempts of senior management to tie the front-line

managers' roles more tightly to the interests of the employer, which though leads to a number of consequences for their social relations at work.

Rose et al. (1987) report that supervisors are not powerless, neither less authoritative under advanced capitalism, and conclude that 'independent, direct and authoritative supervision is still a significant element in the apparatus of social control at the point of production' (p.20-22). Carter et al. (2014) question Rose et al's conclusion that while some aspects of the traditional role of front-line managers had been lost, they still held on to task allocation and decisions about pace and intensity of work. They note that all these powers have been removed and these actors are more tightly controlled from above. Yet, the role is by no means in decline, as post-industrial theorists have suggested, and it remains a functional necessity, rather than a historical anachronism. Similarly, Thomson and Ackroyd (1995) suggest that the arguments related to the decline of supervision are mistaken, while others suggest that the number of supervisors may not be in decline, but their autonomy and responsibilities definitely are (Rose et al., 1987, p.9). Reversely, Lowe (1992) concludes that despite the fact that the analyses in the US and the UK emphasize the redundancy of the supervisor's role, comparative analyses illustrate the supervisor as an important managerial actor, in both technical and HR areas. Similarly, Rose et al. (1987) find that supervisors retain power and authority in the workplace, whilst they are not fully marginal in the employment relationship, nor entirely powerless in shaping working conditions for their subordinates. Unsurprisingly, post-war writings on supervision have reported that foremen have a distinctive role to give orders to those who are not part of the management (Wray 1949 in Levertracy, 1987; 337), recognizing the role as having high status and wide authority on the line (Patten, 1968). Yet, Clarke's (2007) longitudinal study, which explores the development of capitalism in Russia, provides evidence for the contemporary enterprise in that ex-Soviet country, summarizing that the integration of line managers into the management hierarchy, and the encouragement for them to adopt the ideology of capitalist management, is a significant problem in the Russian enterprise. Particularly, such ambiguities are the reasons for an unclear middle and line managerial class, suggesting that the role is found between conflicting pressures. In fact, Clarke finds that the majority of the line managers interviewed identified themselves to be workers, or be closer to the labour class, while only three participants perceive themselves as managers. Similarly, Edwards (2010) suggests that lower level managers share interests with their subordinates, whereas at the same time they are agents of the capital, having different set of interests.

Delbridge and Lowe (1997) suggest that the role and the practices of supervisors are crucial to understand the nature of the workplace relations and the labour process. This argument is based on the authors' data, which illustrate that the supervisors are involved in negotiations, and aim to reach accommodations with their subordinates. Nonetheless, the latter authors find that supervisors face a contradictory role in the capitalist workplace, as they hold the responsibility to co-ordinate the activities of the labour and simultaneously exercise control. Similarly, as Clarke (2007) reports, in the rare case when line managers have been more intergraded and identify themselves to the top management, employee relations tend to become more antagonistic.

Child and Partridge (1982, p.203) argue that the supervisory problem is applicable not only to the manufacturing organization but also to service operations (Carter et al. 2014). The former authors argue that research should not generalize about supervisors, but it should examine the working regimes and the structures of control that they are involved in. Authors note that managers mediate between the head office and employees (see Bolton and Houlihan, 2010; Lloyd and Payne, 2014) and although research has, to some extent, discussed these issues in services, as Child and Partridge's (1982, p.195) note, 'it would be fruitless to discuss ways of dealing with the problem of the supervisor unless we understand how he, the central actor, sees things'. Therefore, it is vital to understand line managers' view and how they perceive their position in contemporary lean working regimes, such as supermarkets, where control, conflict and consent are embedded in the employment relationship. Besides, as Dawson (1991, p.46) concludes, 'there is still a need for greater understanding of supervision through more detailed case studies'. This thesis also stresses the need to modernize the discussion in this area, with research moving beyond the manufacturing context, to explore these issues in other situations, such as services, and lean regimes, such as food retailing. Yet, this study does not only explore a contemporary workplace but it examines these questions within an era of economic recession.

More importantly, this will be also examined through an international comparison because as Lowe et al. (2000) suggest, in different countries there are different perceptions of the supervisory problem. The authors provide a comparative analysis of manufacturing supervision among three different national contexts, and particularly in Japan and Mexico and Britain. Challenging the argument of the supervisory being an Anglo-Saxon problem (Lowe, 1992), they conclude that the Japanese system of supervision, which accommodates

line managers with increasing authority to manage their subordinates effectively (Lowe et al., 2000), is the solution to this problem and it is transferable to other national contexts.

It should not be assumed though, that this research seeks to develop stereotypes towards line managers' perceptions in attendance management. As Hirszowicz (1985) concludes, industrial sociology does not supply ready-made formulas but it helps us to understand the organizational constraints. He comes to this conclusion to suggest that organizations should not provide line managers with ready-made formulas of how they should operate and deal with people responsibilities. He suggests that the top management should allow the latter to understand the situations within which people issues are developed. Hirszowicz (1985) continues saying that it is up to the foreman to find the best circumstances and use his/her own abilities to handle a people management issue. Although, such an argument is well justified under the umbrella of the more contemporary discussion which is related to the rhetorical view regarding the line managers' involvement in HRM, and particularly in attendance management, it seems that the reality comes to illustrate a different perception towards HR devolution. Child and Partridge (1982) find that supervisors tend to give less discretion in handling personnel problems and more in organizing work activities. The authors suggest that due to the complexity, the uncertainty, and the variability of the former, line managers appear to be less keen to be involved in HR, while the intervention of specialists is common to ensure that they follow the formal procedures. Therefore, accepting the classic argument, which suggests that the more formal procedures applied, the less likely for supervisors to have authority over the issue (Child and Partridge, 1982), it is asked: what is happening in the contemporary supermarket shop floor? Although some research has examined how attendance is regulated on the supermarket shop floor and has identified the main responsibilities for line managers within this process (Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003), the knowledge regarding line managers' authority to manage this issue is still limited. The purpose of the research is to provide an understanding of their own perceptions regarding their HR responsibilities and in particular in their HR task to manage attendance, as well as to examine the dynamics that impact on the line managers' involvement in the attendance management process. These will be examined within a sector that follows a global trend to organize work (see Wal-Martization), providing a comparative analysis between two counties with similar IR systems.

4.4 Line managers and attendance at work

Although Child and Partridge (1982) find that absenteeism is hardly found as a part of supervisors' job, more recent research clearly shows that line managers have a central role in managing attendance at work. For example, Townsend (2013, p.432) concludes that the line manager plays an essential role in the informal involvement that influences matters like absenteeism and employee turnover. Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) report that line management seems to have a primary responsibility for the management of absence, while, likewise, Robson and Mavin (2011) report the front-line managers' crucial role in the effective management of sickness absence. Moreover, Cunningham and James (2000) find that the majority of the participants to their research have reported that line managers were participating in absence control systems, such as return-to-work interviews. CBI (2011) research concludes that line managers play a vital role in managing employee absence, with return-to-work interviews emerging as the technique which is most widely rated as effective. Similarly, the previous CBI (2010) report had also found that the line managers' role is critical in helping to manage absence, and to improve attendance, by conducting return-to-work interviews and staying in contact with employees during periods of absence. Contradictorily, Scott and Markham (1982) exploring the most effective absence control methods, rank supervisor's role to maintain daily attendance records low in the list, while a formal attendance policy, the termination of employment, and discipline are indicated as the most effective practices. These arguments though belong to a different era. Renwick (2002, p.264) suggests limited enthusiasm by line managers to take discipline duties, due to the complexity of HR work, and the role of HR specialists being asked to police line managers actions to ensure the effective delivery of HRM .

Edwards and Whitston (1993) find that the personnel management in the NHS did not play a central role in absence control, whereas they aimed to make area managers responsible for their employees. This was a common perception in the 1990s when, rhetorically, personnel managers wanted to push everything to the line (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). The former authors find similar outcomes for Multiplex, a manufacturing company, with supervisors being responsible for recording absence and initiating the first stage of absence control. However, in the British Rail, their third case study, the supervisors had no role in absence management. Similarly, Cunningham and Hyman (1995), exploring four organizations, two of which are NHS trusts, one manufacturing, and one distribution company, discuss the involvement of line managers in HRM, but in different intensity

among cases. In particular, in the NHS, line managers were found responsible to deal with daily employee relations issues, while the manufacturing supervisors were held fully responsible for some personnel tasks. Finally, Cunningham and Hyman show that in the latter organization, line managers delivered a variety of HR responsibilities, with absence management being one of the main concerns of their new role. Likewise, a more recent report finds that line managers take primary responsibility for managing short-term absence (CIPD, 2011). Hence, these findings give weight to those arguments suggesting that line managers' involvement in absence management, varies in different situations, while Lambert and Henly (2012) suggest that the managers' approach to everyday management tasks may vary. Nevertheless, limited research has examined this issue within the food retail sector, stressing the need for more detailed research within this regime in order to understand the line managers' role. As Edwards and Whitston (1989) suggest there is a gap in literature, as the day-to-day managerial practice is not in central focus. Although the latter research lays back in the late 1980s, this thesis similarly argues that our knowledge, regarding attendance management is still limited within the food retail sector.

However, researchers have not completely neglected supermarkets. Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) report that in all the organizations involved in their research, including Tesco supermarkets, the most common activity of front-line managers was absence management. They identify the main responsibilities of line managers in managing absence, reporting that their activities go beyond monitoring absence and lateness, but held responsibilities such as contact absent employees at home, conduction of return interviews, counselling, and disciplinary hearings. Hutchinson and Purcell (2003) use a 'key title' reporting that front-line managers 'bring policies to life', and argue that the employee's discretion is affected by the way line managers exercise their own discretion in how they manage people. Nevertheless, they do not examine the line managers' authority in managing attendance. Although, they find that front-line managers display higher levels of discretion than others on the shop floor, there are no clear data whether such a finding is evidenced in the food retail organization. Furthermore, it is not clear whether line managers' actions are ruled through a formal process, or it is up to their discretion how to act and manage their team.

Edwards and Whitston (1989) have also included retail shops in their research sample, aiming to explore the control of absenteeism within organizations. In both reports though, authors have only focused on the managers' view, including both senior and line managers

in their research samples, whereas both reports have heavily neglected employees' view towards their direct managers. However, this should not be surprising. Levertracy (1987, p.335) argued that "few studies look at supervisors through the eyes of the workers whom they supervise". Yet, this thesis will include employees as participants to the research, as their view is crucial to gain a holistic understanding of the problem examined. Besides, as Levertracy also suggest, since the supervisory position lies in the heart of the employment relationship, such a methodological fallacy is a serious one. Taylor et al. (2010, p.285) also note that 'accounting for workers' experiences is perhaps the single most important dimension of future research' when researching absence. Despite the methodological issues, Edward and Whitston's (1989) report, similar to Hutchinson and Purcell (2003), is not purely focused on retail organizations, and unlike the latter, the type of the five retail organizations that were examined is not specified, lacking to contextualize the line managers' role and to recognize the political, social, economic dynamics that impact on the latter.

Hutchinson and Purcell's (2003) report presents though some crucial findings. Firstly, it is reported that line managers often take actions to manage absence because it is a problem that affects them directly, especially in terms of staffing numbers, as companies have not spared labour to cover absent employees. Despite the arguments supporting that employees do not believe that their absences have impact on their supervisor (Chadwick-Jones et al., 1982), the authors discuss the need for line managers to cover absent employees (Edwards and Whitston, 1989). As MacLean (2008, p.409) suggests "frontline staff were more susceptible to absences than background staff". Edwards and Whitston (1993) find that high absence rates is a bad reflection on managers' abilities, while Bevan et al. (2004) suggest that this process costs time to managers, who are called to arrange covers and this is presented as a key cost for the organizations. Specifically, the authors report that managers spent a significant amount of time on monitoring what is happening in particular cases, having talks with the individuals, the HR, and the occupational health departments, thinking through strategies for covering absences, and provide assistance and training to the replacers. Thus, it is easy to assert that this process is extremely time-consuming and generates costs because managers are distracted from their other responsibilities and neglect other tasks, while absence management forcibly becomes a priority (Bevan et al., 2004).

Correspondingly, Huczynski and Fitzpatrick (1989) find that absenteeism and the process of rescheduling job introduces extra administrative work for managers and introduces delays in their job. Furthermore, they discuss the necessity to maintain and manage an absence control programme, which is run by supervisors, as they are the key actors who are responsible for this process and who are forced to spend their time on revising work schedules, counselling workers, and monitoring the process of replacement. However, keeping in mind the excessive workload and the busy schedules of line managers (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995; McGuire et al., 2008), it is argued that having extra responsibilities and tasks to deliver, deriving from increased absenteeism, affects negatively their personal performance and it is subsequently impacting on their department's performance. As Goodman and Atkin (1984) propose, when the supervisor spends time to administrative work related to absence management, other productivity activities are not performed.

However, Edwards and Whitston (1989) report increasing interest by line managers to take such responsibilities. Yet, this was not universal among the cases examined and it is by no means a matter of line managers aiming to displace specialists. Often HR managers asked line managers to do more, and to handle absence problems, whilst the specialists fulfilled a consultancy role. Yet, unquestionably, the line managers' role suffers from dramatically increased workload, due to the devolvement of HR responsibilities to the line (McGuire et al., 2008). However, Cunningham and Hyman (1995) find that despite the increased workload and the greater responsibility devolved to the line, the majority of line managers appear comfortable with their new responsibilities.

On the other hand, research evidence shows that the management time is a crucial problem, with line managers often neglecting absence management due to feelings of incompetency, or because they do not perceive it as a major problem (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). Renwick (2003) argues that line managers do not perceive themselves as HR experts and are afraid of being criticized for poor performance for not delivering HR effectively and neglecting other parts of their job (Papalexandris and Panayotopoulou, 2005). As a result, they are not willing to take on HR responsibilities and often ignore the negative consequences associated with absence. Thus, absence can become a chronic problem, around which no measures are taken by line managers. This is evidenced through research findings that suggest the unwillingness by line managers to deal with long-term sickness (McGuire et al., 2008) and their reluctance to 'grasp the nettle' of absence control'

(Edwards and Whitston, 1993, p.64). This is not surprising though, as it is found that only a few organizations have used formal methods to manage absence, whilst the development of such formal policies depends on the circumstances of each organization. However, the desirability to devolve absence management responsibilities to the line is a consistent theme in research (Edwards and Whitston, 1989).

Still, questions emerge of how competent are line managers to deliver such practices. A lot of discussion has been developed, whilst researchers have shown increasing interest in line managers' abilities to take HR responsibilities. Therefore, training has been a significant theme in the literature related to the HR devolution. McGuire et al. (2008) argues that the line managers' skills in HR may be a barrier to the effective devolution. It is suggested that the abilities of line managers in HR may be narrow and in combination to a lack of training, they may negatively influence the effectiveness in HR delivery on the line (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997). Moreover, the failure of line managers to understand their HRM role is evidenced and it is a result of the limited training (McCracken and Wallace, 2000). Indeed, Cunningham and Hyman (1995) find that line managers in their cases did not receive adequate training regarding their HR responsibilities. Senior management perceived training as an extra cost, while it is also described as unnecessary for line managers. Similarly, Longenecker and Fink (2006) argue that the lack of training is common, and that line managers are asked to take new roles without training or guidance. This is an outcome of the managers' perceptions towards training, putting it in a lower priority, as well as their reluctance to set training budgets. McGovern et al. (1997) discuss that absence of training leads to inconsistent implementation of HR policies. Specifically, line managers who do not receive adequate training are unlikely to recognize the organisation's needs, and do not deliver the appropriate HR policies (Storey, 1992). Furthermore, Larsen and Brewster (2003, p.231) support that increased costs may lie beneath because of the inability of line managers to take the appropriate decisions, which is of course an outcome of the insufficient training they receive (Hutchinson and Wood, 1995).

Robson and Mavin (2011) have narrowed the discussion on training and focused on the necessity to train line managers in absence management, describing it as a fundamentally important aspect of their role in managing absence. Particularly, they stress the necessity to understand the line managers' learning needs, and they identify and structure their training needs in relation to absence management. Nevertheless, they conclude that a training programme is not effective in isolation. Particularly, they argue that front-line managers

need to be supported by HR professionals, a proposition which is universally stressed by authors who conducted research on HR devolvement. Further, as Kinnie (1999, p.152) concludes: “supervisors need to be trained, encouraged and motivated if they are to take on fully their new responsibilities”

Nonetheless, as research shows, even if line managers are willing to take HR responsibilities, HR managers feel that they do not hold the necessary competences to manage the complexity of the HR job, and they soon go back to specialists for help. Edwards and Whitston (1993) find that HR managers felt that line managers were often unaware of the procedures of absence management, or were unwilling to take such responsibilities. Similar findings are reported by Bennett (2002) who argues that only a small number of line managers demonstrated complete familiarity with the absence policy. Nevertheless, this is linked to the unsupported role of line managers by the specialists. Particularly, Bennett (2002) finds that there is a general confusion among managers in local councils over who is actually responsible to manage absence, while more support is required by HR managers. This is a theme, which has received great attention in literature, and most of the authors have identified limited support towards line managers and their role in HRM and particularly in managing attendance. Bevan and Hayday (1994) determine inadequate consultancy to line managers, which results in ambiguousness and vagueness to their roles. This clearly contradicts the rhetoric view of HR devolvement to the line, which suggests that line managers should accept the ‘partnership’ between HR, line managers and employees in HRM, known as the ‘HR triad’ (Jacson and Schuler, 2000 in Renwick, 2002, p.262).

Even though in some research, it is found that managers took the view that personnel and line managers are working in partnership (Hutchinson and Wood, 1995; Whittaker and Marchington, 2003), the devolution of HR responsibilities to the line does not come without limitations. O’Donnell (1994), for example, summarizes these limitation factors, and discusses the reluctance of line managers to consider themselves as part of the management, because of the bureaucratization of such responsibilities, which is not attractive to the line managers. In addition, Hutchinson and Wood (1995) suggest that organizations need to achieve a balance between two conflicting aims. To be more specific, they note that the contradictory role of line managers is reflected to the organization’s endeavour to provide them with the freedom to manage their people, while on the other hand, there is a need to introduce control systems and directions. Hence, authors’

arguments that line managers' actions are not auto directed, but HR specialists should fulfil a consultancy role, in order to decide what action to be taken (MacLean, 2008), belongs to a rhetoric sphere of employment, with the reality being distant to the ideal and rhetoric HR devolution to the line.

Nevertheless, the problems and contradictions between the rhetoric and reality of the HR devolvement are not seemed to be attached only to the line. Gibb (2003) for instance, stresses that the line managers' involvement reduces the use of HR specialists, which may result in the absence of specialists, ensuing negative effects. Thornhill and Saunders (1998a) mention that without HR specialist guidance and support, line managers are left alone to deliver HR as they think appropriate. Hence, the 'absentee specialist scenario' (p.474) leads to a failure for HRM to be efficiently delivered on the line. On the other hand, Larsen and Brewster (2003) support that the most important finding from their research is that devolving HR responsibilities to line managers, entails the reduction to the size of the HR department and, hence, the reduction of costs. Finally, Papalexandris and Panayotopoulou (2004, p.288) found that HR managers experience a fear of reduction or even redundancy of their own work if HR is devolved to the line, while similarly Storey (1992) discusses the invasion of non-specialists in HR, generates feelings of threat for personnel managers. Hence, the latter are found unwilling to share their job and knowledge with line managers, due to job insecurity feelings, as they perceive HR devolution as a threat to their job (Hutchinson and Wood, 1995). Therefore, it is argued that HR managers often do not devolve away their role, and lack the enthusiasm to enhance the line managers' role in HRM (Storey, 1992).

However, as Storey (1992) suggests, there is a noticeable lack of examination of what devolution means in practice, and to take this a step further, it is suggested that authors also lacked to examine what devolution means for the social actors involved in such a process. Besides, as Child and Partridge (1982) argue, supervisors should be regarded as actors in their work situation, and we should understand them as individuals, and how they perceive problems as they see them. Therefore, although, Robson (2008) tried to explore the personal characteristics of line managers in relation to their involvement in absence management, this research will focus on the sociological characteristics of the line management position and the line managers' involvement in managing attendance, as the actors who are involved in the labour process and particularly the management of attendance. Yet, despite the arguments suggesting that line managers are willing to regard

employee relations as part of their job, the evidences showing that they spend a significant amount of their time on personnel issues (Storey, 1992), as well as the argument that they have been heavily engaged in personnel management (Edwards, 1987), the question of how do line managers engage in the management of people is still unanswered (Storey, 1992). For the purposes of this research, a central theme is to analyse how line managers engage in the management of attendance at work.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion regarding the HR devolution to line managers and particularly, the importance of the line managers' role in the effective management of absence and attendance at work. It argues that this issue has not been explored in depth empirically, especially in the food retail sector whilst, , a closer examination is necessary to understand better the managerial actions in managing attendance. Additionally, through a sociological analysis, the thesis looks beyond the extant research that merely acknowledges their involvement in administrating absence management policies. It does not only examine whether line managers are involved in attendance policies, but also seeks to understand their authority and discretion in directly influencing absence and building consent, as well as to explore the (informal) practices to negotiate and manage workplace attendance.

5. Methodology

This chapter discusses the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and outlines the epistemological considerations and the methodological approach undertaken for this research to meet the research objectives. It discusses the approaches and methods adopted in this research and demonstrates how the research questions have been operationalized within the logic of discovery of this thesis.

As the previous chapters have shown this thesis aims to understand the political, economic, and social structures and dynamics within the grocery retail sector and provides a comparison between the UK and Cyprus. It explores the sector's political economy in the era of austerity, drawing on comparative data between two European countries with similar regulating regimes, and aims to understand the impact on the nature of work. This first question, and its particular objectives, set the terrain within which the thesis develops the next question. The theoretical framework of this thesis is found within the labour process theory. The research explores the dynamics of workplace attendance and absence management within the 'lean' regime of grocery retailing and examines how the dynamics of workplace attendance and absence manifest within the labour process. Finally, within this theoretical framework, the role of line managers in the labour process and in managing attendance is examined, whilst their level of autonomy within this process is also explored.

The chapter discusses first critical realism as the ontological position from which the research design was influenced. This is followed by a discussion regarding the theoretical and the practical issues of the research strategy. The two phases of primary data collection are outlined next. Finally, attention is given to the analysis of the data and the potential limitations of the research. Given that this research provides an international comparison, the lessons learnt from doing international research will be highlighted throughout the chapter.

5.1 The philosophical assumptions

Research philosophy benefits us¹ [as researchers] to shape our awareness of the broader context of our research plans and findings (Bryman, 2002) and as Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.2) note 'our behaviour is motivated by what we believe about the world'; therefore our ontological views. Similarly, as Fleetwood (2005, p.198) puts it thriftily, "ontology *matters*" [emphasis added]. Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000a, p.5) discuss

¹ Writing in the first person throughout this chapter is perhaps necessary due to the wider recognition of the 'researcher as agent.'

ontology as the ‘enquiry into the nature of being, of existence, asking the question ‘What exists?’, which translates into the epistemological question of ‘How we can know what exists?’

Researchers need to construct their research over a paradigm or as Khun describes it, ‘a model of thinking’. A paradigm is a set of ideas and values, which help the researcher to explain the world and inform action (see Clarke and Clegg, 2000, p.46). Philosophers and authors on philosophy of science have discussed the epistemological foundations of the researcher as another level of abstraction, which drives our knowledge of what is found as scientific knowledge and what is not. Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.2) note that epistemology sets the ontological conditions to what is justified as knowledge, whilst O’Mahoney and Vincent (2014) argue that our epistemological concerns are affected by our ontological beliefs and commitments. Therefore ontology and epistemology are important for the researcher as they shape the research questions, they set the foundation of the research designs that we employ to investigate and answer those questions, and allow us to provide claims about ‘knowledge’(Johnson and Duberley, 2000; O’Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

This study adopts a critical realist approach, due to the social facts and social phenomena included in the research problem (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The chapter next discusses the principal assumptions of critical realism and presents the link between the research and critical realism in an attempt to clarify my personal ontological views that are rooted in this thesis.

5.1.2 Critical Realism

Many commentators have discussed the epistemic fallacies of the two extreme philosophical positions (positivism/social constructionism) and suggested critical realism as an alternative, a reference point, and source of inspiration for research (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000b; Edwards, 2006; Karlsson, 2004; Sayer, 2004, 1992). This chapter will not go on to discuss other doctrines; neither will get involved in a philosophical debate. Yet, Sayer’s argument is important to be stressed:

Critical realism provides an alternative to several philosophical and methodological positions which have been found wanting...[In fact] critical realism seeks to avoid both scientism and ‘science-envy’ on the one hand [naturalism] and radical rejections of science on the other [postmodernism] (Sayer, 2000, pp.2–3)

Critical realism has been developed primarily by Bhaskar as the approach to overcome the slippages of the prevailing philosophical paradigms (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014; Syed et al., 2010). As Elger (2010) reports, critical realism combines the ontological view of naturalism for the existence of an objective world, but also recognizes that the scientific knowledge is socially constructed. Therefore, as Sayer (2000) notes, critical realism 'offers great promise for social science and theory' (p.2).

A growing amount of literature presents and evaluates critical realism and its implications for social science. I am not aiming to discuss this massive volume of philosophical literature; rather I will restrict myself to merely describing the key assumptions of critical realism and to explain how these fit to the current research.

Critical realism can be summed in a sentence: that an objective world exists independently of individuals' perception of it, language, and imagination (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014; Williams and May, 2002). As Bhaskar (2008b, p.287) puts it, "Normally to be a realist in philosophy is to be committed to the existence of some disputed kind of being (e.g. material objects, causal laws, social structures)". In simple words, as Easton (2010, p.119) reports, "Critical realists assume that there is a real world out there', which cannot be approved or disapproved as social constructionists argue". Critical realists, similarly to naturalists, act as the world is inherently true and real.

Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000b) describe the social world, through the critical realism lenses, as a product of human action, which though is not necessarily a product of human design or discourse, rejecting the postmodernism beliefs (Ackroyd, 2004). Therefore, the social phenomena can exist, even though the human actors that are involved have no knowledge of them. Phenomena can still go on and exist independently of their identification (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000b, p.11). Therefore, as Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000b, p.11) put it: 'social phenomena are concept *dependent* [emphasis original] or socially constructed...but still exist externally to them and shape their opinion'. Similarly, as Johnson and Duberley (2000, p.152) suggest 'a [critical] key realist orientation is a metaphysical commitment to unobservable entities-things that cannot be measured or observed via our senses may be still real'. Yet, human activity and their interaction with an independent reality, which facilitate actions, remain vital to critical realism.

In this thesis, I am arguing that the organizations/food retailers and the organization of work (as social structures) exist within a materially real world (countries) and they include

generative mechanisms (rules, control, policies). Organizations exist independently of the human actors' (managers, employees, customers, etc.) perceptions of them, but they depend on their actions. For example, whether actors acknowledge or not the embedded tight control in the organization of work in supermarkets, the managerial control as a social phenomenon exists independently of actors' perceptions of it, but they still generate potential actions and behaviours (resistance/consent). Therefore, managerial control is not constructed through discourse, but it is a real phenomenon that exists independently of our perceptions. Yet, although it is not determined or constructed by employees' perceptions of control, it still depends on their conception regarding its impact on their employment conditions. Employees can reproduce and act accordingly, to change, or at least try to change, the latter (Ackroyd, 2004; Fleetwood, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Thompson and Vincent, 2010). For critical realism, as Reed (2000, p.53) puts it: "the logic of scientific research is to identify the underlying generative mechanisms that produce and manifest phenomena as observable contingent tendencies or practices".

Critical realism also criticizes the failure of naturalism to recognize the openness of the social world. It challenges the ontological determinism of functionalism and consequently the assumption that the organization -as a social structure- has an independent identity of the social relations and practices through which it was initially generated (Reed, 2011). Therefore, the employment relationship exists independently of human designs. Yet it cannot be examined or measured in isolation in a closed system, rather it is part of a wider and complex system (market, competition, state regulations, and organizations), which impacts on its construction. Therefore, the social phenomena do not exist in a vacuum rather they are constructed within social structures and in a complex and stratified reality (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000a).

The independent nature of the world is a critical point of debate within the philosophy literature. I will avoid replicating these discussions here. Besides much ink was spend by several authors to provide the argument in favour of critical realism (see Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000a; Archer et al., 1998; Bhaskar, 2008a; Collier, 1994; Danermark et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2014; Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004; Sayer, 2000, 1992). What I want to emphasize though, is Sayer's (1992, p.5) discussion regarding the stratification of the world and the powers of objects, as similarly shown by Fleetwood (2005) and his discussion of the modes of real. O'Mahoney and Vincent (2014) refer to this as 'depth

ontology', whilst Olsen (2010, p.xxi) uses the term 'ontic depth' to refer to a complex and multilayer world.

This emerges from Bhaskar's (2008a) discussion on the three domains of the world: *the real, the actual and the empirical*. Bhaskar puts forward the argument that the universe is a naturally multilayered open system of interrelated parts of entities that interact over time. He refers to social and natural entities which "are viewed as *really constituted* in that they have *causal powers* (affect outcomes in specific ways) and *susceptibilities* (are affected by the powers of other entities in specific ways)" (see Thompson and Vincent, 2010, p.51). Critical realists distinguish between these three strata of social reality, which are interconnected through complex processes and relations, but they cannot be conflated with each other.

Critical realism distinguishes between the experience (the empirical), events (the actual), structures, and powers of objects (the real). In contrast to the flat ontologies of the two other ontological doctrines, critical realism argues that the world is characterized by emergence. In other words, the organizations, for example, emerge from the relational combinations between mechanisms operating at each of the three domains of reality (Reed, 2011, p.56). Therefore, unlike the positivists who experiment in closed systems of reality and the postmodernists who support the existence of multiple realities that are constructed through discourse, critical realism acknowledges the complexity of reality and the attempts to-empirically- understand the power, the structures, and the mechanisms that exist in the actual and real domains. Therefore, rather than controlling or simplifying the complex multilayer reality, as naturalists do, neither than just observing language, as postmodernists do, critical realists advocate that the complexity needs to be explored in depth to be understood (Clark, 2008).

The recognition of a stratified reality is strongly linked to the analysis of causality. Critical realism identifies causation through the exploration of mechanisms of cause and effect, which underlie regular events that can be revealed in the real through the principle of retroduction, as Bhaskar argues. In other words, for critical realists, causation is not merely about a symmetrical appearance and proof of causation through a deductive approach, rather it is to be identified through the exploration of the powers that generated the event. Central to this view is the abstract identification of the structures of mechanisms, which, although they are not directly observable, they trigger and direct the events of experience

and therefore explain *why* [emphasis original] regularities occurred. (Johnson and Duberley, 2000)

However, let us move beyond the theoretical and philosophical discussion of critical realism and examine the applicability of critical realism in this thesis. In order to do that, we need to consider the stratified reality within which the case study organizations of this research operate, and also identify the structures, the mechanisms, the conditions, and the events that exist in the different domains.

This research examines the role of line managers in managing attendance at work within the food retail sector. Three main objectives have been developed for this research. Firstly, the research aims to understand the political, economic, and social structures and dynamics within the grocery retail sector, and to understand their impact on the employment relationship. Secondly, it explores the dynamics of workplace attendance within the grocery- retail sector, examines how workplace attendance and absence are part of the contested and antagonistic employment relationship on the supermarket shop floor, and investigates the manifestations of absence and attendance within the labour process. The final and central objective of this research is the examination of the line managers' role in the management of absence and workplace attendance.

The three main interconnected objectives do not emerge in a vacuum. The thesis follows the labour process theory principles to develop the conceptual framework of this thesis and critical realism is the ontological and the epistemological glue to develop the research objectives. Particularly, the first objective aims to provide an analysis of the food retail sector's political economy. Espousing the 'depth ontology' of critical realism and following Thompson and Vincent's (2010) discussion on the labour process theory, critical realism, and political economy, I attempt to provide an analysis of the complex reality within which supermarkets operate, in order to understand the causal relationships within the food retail sector employment relationship. To clarify this point, a central objective of this research is to understand the manifestation of absence as an expression of industrial conflict. The literature above has explicitly discussed this dyad within the employment relationship. However, to be able to empirically understand this causal effect (control→resistance/consent) we need to understand the wider conditions within which this causal relationship emerges. Thompson and Vincent (2010, p.57) quote Peck stressing the argument that "LPT needs to look over the factory gates to understand the broader dynamics of capitalism". The same authors argue that "critical realism encourages

researchers to consider how labour processes are affected by the transitive (the conditions of knowing and being) and intransitive (external conditions, including any interactions between structured mechanisms beyond the labour process)” (p.62). Therefore, to understand the food retail employment relationship on the shop floor, we need to understand the wider political economy, the conditions and the structures that construct and affect the supermarket job features (competition, market, cost management, customer service customer demands, value supply chains, internationalization) – see the figure below. These are some of the features of the political economy of the sector that need to be understood in order to provide a thorough analysis of the problem examined. What should be noted at this point then is that the employment relationship and the work organization within food retail is a result of a wider complex reality and structures, which forces the organizations/employers (food retailers) to exercise control (generative mechanism) in order to control the labour power. Nevertheless, this leads to other outcomes such as resistance or consent (effects/events), as employees attempt to change their conditions. Similarly, the line managers’ role in managing absence is not a simple linear relationship, rather a complex system of the reality. Line managers as agents are involved in the complex wider structures and are called to manage a complex behaviour through mechanisms such as policies and procedures. The figure below illustrates the stratified reality of food retailing and the causal relationship between structures and mechanisms that lead to potential effects. Clearly, it is impossible to provide answers to the particular research objectives within a straight linear relationship, as positivists would argue. The social reality is complex and involves different strata, which need to be recognized, as they are interconnected.

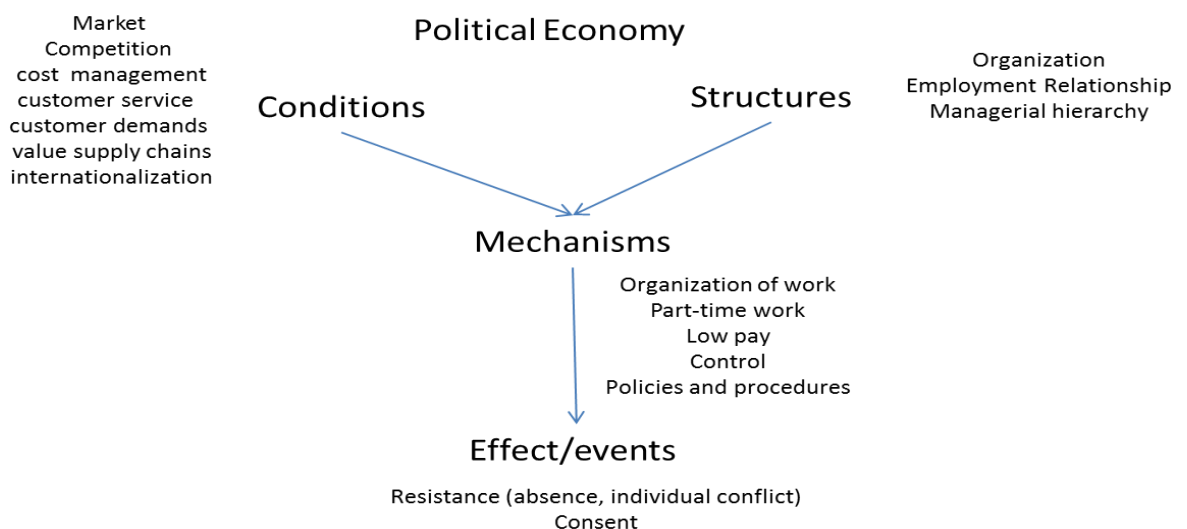


Figure 1: Critical realism view of causation in the current research (adjusted from Sayer, 2000; 15)

To conclude, critical realism provides the necessary logic and rationale to the development of the “appropriate methodological and theoretical framework that are used to inform the appropriate empirical work” (Fleetwood and Ackroyd, 2004, p.xv). Through the analysis of the wider political economy, as an attempt to understand the complex and multi-layered reality, critical realism offers the basis to gain a better conception of the systems we study (Thompson and Vincent, 2010, p.66) and access the ‘truth’. Nevertheless, as Sayer (2004, p.7) suggests critical realists do not claim absolute truth about a situation, rather they recognize the value of ‘epistemic gain’.

5.2 Research Design

This section describes the research design developed in this research. Firstly, it provides the rationale for the adoption of a qualitative approach and the multiple international case study strategy. Next, the methods that were utilized within this design are described, providing arguments regarding the pluralism of the research instruments, whilst next a description of the two phases of the research fieldwork follows.

5.2.1 An intensive approach

Critical realism does not favour any particular research method, as found in positivism and postmodernism, and permits a wide variety of methods to be applied. Epistemologically speaking, critical realism allows the researchers to select their investigatory tools based on the nature of the object of study, and what one wants to learn about it (Sayer, 2000, p.19). As Ackroyd (2004, p.129) notes “it all depends what kind of tasks there are to do and what is being sought to be accomplished what tool to be used”.

Nevertheless, critical realists adopt a methodology that remains sensitive to the social structures and the multi-layered reality. The aim is to understand the interlinked relationships between the structure and the agency, to identify a series of structural tendencies always though by considering the interpretations of the agents/participants (Pratten, 2004). Therefore this research, following the assumptions of critical realism, is interested to “connect the inner world of ideas with the outer world of observable events as flawlessly as possible” (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014, p.21)

Sayer’s theoretical contribution comes to clarify and resolve, at least to some extent, the decisions over the appropriate research design for critical realists. As Hurrell (2014, p.243) reports, ‘the choice of method within critical realism rests on Sayer’s (2000, 1992) distinction between *extensive* and *intensive* research designs’. Extensive designs search for regularities within specific populations and groups that are defined taxonomically. The

approach suggests that a large number of repeated observations reveal relations that are significant, and by utilizing quantitative methods, the researchers seek for statistic relations among the variables. Nevertheless, as Sayer (2000) argues this approach neglects the causal groups within which the agents and entities are involved. Therefore, this approach is inappropriate to answer the problematic of this research as through this approach the research would just provide the statistic association between the variables and would only present a repeating observation to suggest that these variables (control-resistance-consent) are interconnected. In other words, in this thesis taking the extensive approach would merely answer whether absence is an expression of industrial conflict, revealing only how extensive this phenomenon is on the shop floor and generalize it to the wider population (Sayer, 2000)

Nevertheless, to understand a behaviour (attendance within the labour process) one should examine its meaning and explore it in the wider complex environment within which it is located, seeking for deeper explanations, rather for a simplified experimental result. Although, statistical analysis, as proposed by the extensive design, could reveal connections between the two, the latter neglects the social aspect of the issue examined and the complex employment relationship on the food retail shop floor.

These limitations are reduced through an intensive design, which is followed in this research. Sayer (2000, p.20) suggests that this approach is primarily concerned with “what makes things happen in specific cases”. The intensive approach focuses on the individual, though not necessarily to individual people, and traces the main causal relationships into which they entry and study their qualitative nature. In other words, this approach seeks for causal explanations and interpretation of meanings, traditionally utilizing qualitative tools and focuses on smaller number of cases, although the doctrine shows no particular preference of specific methods (Thompson and Vincent, 2010).

Therefore, in this research I adopt predominantly the intensive research design following a qualitative methodology and a multiple case study strategy, a decision that is driven by my ontological assumptions as a critical realist. As Sayer (2000) concludes, critical realist research gives priority to conceptualization and abstraction, and seeks for connections among phenomena rather than seeking for regularities. Additionally, I recognize the stratification of the social reality, as discussed above, within which attention is given to the causal powers of entities and the operation of generative mechanisms within the context. Therefore, recognizing the concept-depended phenomenon of attendance at work, I aim to

conceptualize the manifestation of attendance within the labour process. Yet, this is by no means a linear relationship rather a complex phenomenon, which is located in a complex reality. I aim to understand the meaning of attendance at work for different agents and their role within the stratified reality. Besides, realists accept that ‘there are multiple perspectives or competing claims about the nature of the social world’ (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000b, p.15). Yet one should not confuse the term ‘multiple perspectives’ with the postmodernists beliefs for ‘multiple realities’.

5.2.1.1 A qualitative approach

A qualitative approach is followed to answer the research questions. Many critical realism supporters tend to use a mixed method approach to provide the ‘best of both worlds’ by combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Hurrell, 2014, p.244). This is a common practice in business and management research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). I am not arguing for or against this approach. Yet, it is important to note that for the purposes of this research, where the aim is to gain a deep understanding of the social relations, quantitative methods have little to give. Besides, referring again to critical realism ontology, choosing a method is not merely a choice of validity, as positivists argue, rather it is a choice of penetration to understand the meanings within a social phenomenon and to gain a broader and secure understanding of the issues under investigation (Maxwell, 2012a, p.106).

Although validity is still a concept that the researcher keeps in mind, I am more concerned with the correctness and credibility of a discussion, conclusion, explanation, or interpretation, rather implying the existence of an objective truth to which an account is to be compared (Maxwell, 1996, p.87). Therefore, the methodological pluralism allows different grey sides of the problem to be shed and provides space for further exploration, rather than seeking for tests for validity (Bloor, 1997). Ackroyd (2004, p.138) reports: “ideas about research methods are closely related to ideas about explanation”. Hence, the aim is not to claim the ‘absolute truth’ but to claim access and explain reality (Thompson, 2004). Realists believe that truth is possible, and they are interested to find out what truth is and how it can be secured. Yet at the same time, they recognize the fallacy of social research (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000b). Therefore, discussing for methods one should keep in mind how to better understand reality, rather to merely achieve scientific validation.

Nevertheless, I am not completely ignoring the latter. In this research, I am utilizing qualitative research tools within a qualitative mixed method approach (semi-structured

interviews and secondary data analysis) in order to develop the most possible realistic interpretation of the reality. This decision is mainly driven by the need to understand the complexity of the real world (Syed et al., 2010). Multi-methodology equipped me with more confidence over the extracted findings and allowed me to triangulate the interview findings and also to gain a better and deeper understanding of people's experiences and therefore explain the social meanings emerged through the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2001). More discussion regarding the tools utilized in this research follows below.

5.2.1.2 Multiple case studies

A significant amount of literature has discussed case studies as a research design, which is vital within the social science and particularly management research, while the case study strategy is found consistent with the critical realism ontology (Sayer, 1992). Vincent and Wapshott (2014, p.156) note that case-based analyses have become a methodological mainstay within critical realism, whilst Kessler and Bach (2014) argue that critical realists exhibit an increasing interest in case studies within the organizational research, and this is mainly related to the strong interest in the context, the causation, and the generative mechanisms that explain a process.

Case studies, in line with critical realism principles, are interested in searching out explanations (Kessler and Bach, 2014). Yin (2003, p.1) describes case studies as a preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are asked, when the researcher has little control over the phenomena explored and when the focus is on contemporary phenomena in a real-life context. In other words, a case study design offers the opportunity of an in depth analysis of the phenomena under investigation, within their organizational context, as critical realism suggests.

Elger (2010) reports that case studies are taken seriously by critical realists due to the increasing interest to investigate actors' discourses and the concern to set specific social processes within specific contexts. Additionally, case studies can be used to explain everyday practices, such as absenteeism, that are affected by the working regime in which they are embedded and in cross-national research. As Lee (1999) argues, by using case studies, the researchers can justify a level of causal interpretation due to the in-depth nature of this research strategy and the focus on the situational embedded processes (see Tharenou et al., 2007, pp.75–76). Similarly, Vincent and Wapshott (2014) note that case study research offers us, through theory, space to develop a better causal explanation of mechanisms by exploring the power interactions at different levels. Additionally,

Partington (2002, pp.76–77) notes that the purpose of a case study is not simply to describe a situation, rather it enables the researcher to “build a plausible explanation or to discover a causal relationship that links the antecedents with the results”

In line with the critical realism argument of a stratified reality, utilizing case studies provided to the researcher a useful strategy to analyse and understand the complexity of the real world at different strata (Easton, 2000). As Kessler and Bach (2014) argue, for critical realism the case study needs to recognize the specific situational factor in a broader context, within which the generative mechanisms are located, and suggest that a comparative approach is necessary to identify these broad tendencies. This explains the comparative case-study strategy taken in this research. The flexibility of this strategy allowed me to provide a multi-level analysis of the sector’s political economy across the two countries explored, in order to gain a holistic understanding of the organizational reality dynamics, to identify the institutional mechanisms, to develop the framework in which absence is managed, and to understand the causal relationships between the mechanisms. As Harrison and Easton (2004, p.180) note, the use of case studies allows the researcher to tease out layers of reality, seeking for generative mechanisms and this process creates a deeper analysis of the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ rather than only the ‘whats’; thus, it provides explanations (Partington, 2002). Finally, as Tharenou et al (2007, p.78) report, a case study is not just a story or description; rather it is a theoretically driven endeavour to recognize and explain complex phenomena within a specific context.

Therefore, this research adopts an embedded multiple case-studies approach and provides a comparative analysis between the UK and Cyprus food retail sector. Four case study organizations were explored, two in each country. This multiple international case study strategy allowed both the within-case and the cross-case analysis as Yin argues (Tharenou et al., 2007, p.79), whereas in this thesis also allowed the cross-national analysis. Carrying out the comparison of the international case studies within this similar context – grocery retailing- ‘allowed a more detailed understanding of the deep processes involved in the context’ (Harrison and Easton, 2004, p.181). In other words, the international comparison of the four cases provided a holistic understanding to the sector’s political economy and enabled the deep analysis of the organization of work within which control is embedded and resistance/absence/consent is an emerging event.

Clearly, rather than focusing on one case, or even one country, this research aims to wider the discussion and the problematic of this research, through a comparative case design in

order to understand the social phenomenon better (Kessler and Bach, 2014, p.172). Yet, this decision is driven by the researcher's understanding for theoretical replications. As Yin (2003) discusses, multiple-cases are preferred over single-cases because the latter is open to criticism of 'putting all the eggs in one basket', whilst the former is more powerful, providing the opportunity to explore differences and similarities between the cases and increases what Yin calls 'external validity', through the replication logic. Although, this is a positivistic approach taken by Yin, equalizing case studies with experiments, arguing that more experiments and therefore more cases provide results that are more valid, this argument is also found in critical realism writings. Yet, Harrison and Easton (2004) suggest that, for critical realism the issue is not how many cases are investigated, rather which are these cases and why they were selected.

Finally, a vital issue, which has been discussed in literature, is related to generalizability, whether the findings of a particular qualitative research can be generalized, and whether they are transferable (Saunders et al., 2009). In other words, although a comparative case study method is followed across two countries the criticism on generalizability is still present. However, generalization for critical realists has a different meaning than for positivists. Whilst the latter position discusses the statistical generalization of the findings, critical realists argue that the findings can be generalized to theory (Partington, 2002). Hence, the aim of this research is not to statistically replicate the findings to the wider population of grocers and employees in the UK or Cyprus. Rather, it discusses a theoretical phenomenon, using a multilevel analysis, which contributes to the theoretical grounds adopted for this research. Therefore, the multi-case strategy does not aim to increase the statistical validity of a sample, rather it provides a deeper explanation of the social problem analysed in this thesis.

5.2.1.2.1 The comparison rationale

As it was previously mentioned in this thesis, this is a comparative study between the UK and Cyprus food retail sector. This section discusses the rationale and explains the logic behind this comparison, on a national and organizational level.

The UK food retail market has received great attention by researchers, who come from a variety of disciplines, such as history, marketing and, of course, organizational research (see for example Alexander, 2011; Askenazy et al., 2010; Burt, 2010; Grugulis et al., 2011a; Lichtenstein, 2006b). This tradition in retail research recognizes the long history of the UK in food retailing, and the power of British retailers. It is a fact that some UK

grocers are today in the ‘top-three’ global retailers (Deloitte, 2013, 2011; Seth and Randall, 2001). On the other hand, limited research has examined this sector in Cyprus. Although some European research includes Cyprus retailing in their sample (see for example Myers and Alexander, 2007), limited attention has been given on the emerging market of Cyprus food retailing, while limited research has explored the employment relationship within this market. As it is discussed later, and as it was briefly explained in Chapter 2, Cyprus grocery retailing faced changes in its structure after 2005, when international retailers invested in the country. This research suggests that this market is worth exploring, as the internationalization of retailing, which is a major research driver in retail research, impacts on the employment relationship (Debrah and Smith, 2002; Muller-Camen et al., 2001; Streeck, 1998). This study, discusses the establishment of the ‘Wal-Martization’ trend across the two countries. Following the academic arguments of the Wal-Mart being the new template for food retailers on a global scale (Lichtenstein, 2005), this research explores whether and how the ‘Wal-Mart effect’ impacts on the work organization in the mature UK food retail market and the growing Cyprus food retail market. The comparison between these two markets also aims to understand the dynamics that emerge in each country as a result of the increasing international competition in both countries.

In Chapter 2, the thesis has explained the international nature of food retailing and has presented other research that examines particular issues of the employment relationship in comparative analyses (see for example Carré and Tilly, 2010). Yet, in this research, the comparison was not unsystematic. The logic behind the choice of the UK and Cyprus goes beyond the history of food retailing research in each country and one of the main drivers of this comparison is the similar industrial relations system between the two. As it was explained in Chapter 2, the Cyprus IR system development was heavily influenced by the UK system as a result of its colonial history. Both countries are liberal economies, while the de-regulation of the employment relationship is evident in both countries (Ioannou, 2011), especially in the era of austerity. Yet, again, limited research has examined these issues in the changing economy of Cyprus, while it is worth exploring what are the differences and similarities between the two countries, in terms of how is the labour process influenced by the wider IR system. Saying that, the objective of this research is not of course to explore the IR system in detail; yet, the impact on the work organization should be recognized. Following the ‘Wal-Martization’ discussion, as the dynamic that impacts on the work organization for food retailers, it is important to investigate how this

global trend, in conjunction to the similar IR system impact on the labour process, the manifestation of attendance within the latter and the line managers' role.

Overall, this research provides a comparison between two countries with different history in food retailing but with a similar IR system. These dynamics drive the comparison rational between the UK and Cyprus grocery retail sector, in the era of austerity. Given the economic climate in Cyprus, the recent banking crisis and the de-regulation of the IR system in this country, it is interesting to explore how these issues impact on the employment relationship and the manifestation of attendance in the labour process. Similarly, in the UK, food retailers face profit reduction, which are a result of the recession, and the increasing and intense price competition. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact on attendance and the general employment relationship. These changing dynamics in the Cyprus economy and in the Cyprus food retailing, as well as the wave of austerity and the reduced profits for food retailers in the UK, are worth to be investigated in relation to the problematic of this research – attendance at work.

Finally, at the organizational level, although this is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, it should be briefly noted that the case study organizations in each country are leaders in their market. The choice of these four case studies was driven by their size, their position and share in the market, as well as their power as employers. Besides, in both countries grocers are one the bigger employers, whilst in both countries the case study organizations selected are two of the 'Big four' food retailers in each country. Additionally, a home-grown (UK1 and Cy1) and a multinational (UK2 and Cy2) food retailer was examined in each country. To be more specific, UK1 and Cy1 started their business in the UK and Cyprus respectively. Although UK1 is also an international retailer – see below – it has a British identity. On the other hand, UK2 and Cy2 invested in the UK and Cyprus respectively, as part of their globalization strategy. This selection aims the consistency of the comparison on the organizational level.

5.2.1.3 The Research Instruments

Following the case study approach, a multi-methodological approach was taken in this research. Easton (2000) discusses the utilization of multiple data sources within the case study strategy to dig even deeper in the understanding of the reality strata. Kessler and Bach (2014) similarly suggest the use of complementary data sources as the basis of retrodution, whilst Harrison (2002, p.159) notes that 'researchers have to be constantly challenged to confirm or disconfirm a theory from the wealth of evidence that surrounds

them'. Therefore, retroduction drives the utilization of a mixed approach of qualitative research instruments in this thesis.

A significant amount of the research methodology literature, describes various techniques to secure qualitative data (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Corbetta, 2003; Keegan, 2009; Partington, 2002; Saunders et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the choice of the research methods in this thesis is purposive and appropriate to answer the particular research questions. As Miles and Huberman (1984) (cited in Silverman, 2004, p.110) report: 'knowing what you want to find out leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information'.

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the core primary data collection tool, which was combined with a secondary data analysis. As Keegan (2009, p.93) argues, the utilization of a mixture of methodologies generates multiple perspectives and the different data secured by each method lead to a rounded interpretation and analysis of the research problem. Next, this section describes the primary research instrument - interviews- and continues with a detailed description of the undertaken fieldwork where the secondary data method is also discussed.

5.2.2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews are probably the most common method of social research (Smith and Elger, 2014). Interviewing is described as a flexible, face-to-face meeting between the researcher and participant that aims to understand their perspectives and explore their experiences, as they are expressed in their own words (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As Smith and Elger (2014, p.110) discuss the interviews are 'a dialogue where the meanings, explanations and emotions articulated by interviewees are taken seriously by researchers'. Ehigie and Ehigie (2005, p.627) similarly argue that the research interview is formed as a conversation between the two parties (researcher-participant), rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange, whilst Tuckman (in Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, 2008, p.132) describes interviews as the 'doorway' to what is hidden in the mind of the interviewees.

Participants are viewed as 'meaning makers' and the purpose of the researcher is to understand the meaning of respondents' experiences (Warren, 2001). In other words the qualitative interviewing is more constructionist in its nature rather than naturalistic, as the focus of the qualitative research is the participants' view and to understand their perspective on the research problem. Perspectives are important in qualitative research where the meaning making is at the centre of the process. As Smith and Elger (2014,

p.110) put it: ‘the interview as a process of human interaction involves a mutual construction of meanings and the possibility of the joint construction of knowledge about experiences, events, and activities’.

A distinction is made by authors between structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews, whilst a significant amount of literature discusses the philosophical underpinnings behind the researchers’ choice of their research instruments. In fact, an ongoing debate is found in the literature between mainly the positivists and social constructionists regarding the form of interviews (Smith and Elger, 2014). This research following the critical realism ontological assumptions, utilizes semi-structured interviews as the main tool for primary data collection. Refusing the naturalistic structured interviews, and at the same time rejecting the abstract nature of postmodern unstructured interviews, I am utilizing semi-structured interviews to provide an extent of structure in my methodology, as critical realism suggests, as a resource to understand the multilayer social world (Smith and Elger, 2014).

Additionally, it is argued that within the multiple-case study strategy adopted in this research, some structure is required in order to ensure cross-case comparability (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.480). As King (2004, p.12) reports, ‘realists interviews may be rather more structured than other qualitative interviews because the need to ensure that different participants’ accounts and different types of data can be systematically compared’. Therefore, semi-structured interviews provide the necessary degree of structure, whilst at the same time they encourage flexibility to explore the research enquiries and allow the deeper understanding of the problem examined by revealing participants’ perceptions and providing the necessary comparability between individuals and cases. Semi-structured interviews are, and I will dare to say must be, a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984, p.102) or a ‘guided conversation’ (Warren, 2001, p.85), that is “grounded in specific contexts, events and examples in order to illuminate the complexity of the phenomena being investigated” (Thompkins et al., 2008, p.18). For critical realists, interviewing is not just the product of a conversation between the researcher and the participant, but it is informed by an analytical conceptual framework, which guides the questions asked and suggests probing as a tactic to ensure validity of the knowledge constructed through this process (Smith and Elger, 2014).

Although critical realism share a common ground with postmodernists in the interpretative approach in interviewing, and similarly recognize the significance of meaning construction

as a topic of investigation and theorizing, we [critical realists] emphasize the social action that takes place in a specific context of pre-existing social relations and structures, which impact on agents actions. Therefore, the qualitative interview process is not an open discussion controlled by the interviewee, rather it is a theory-driven, and a reality-structured practice, which is controlled by the interviewers and their theoretical framework, at least to an extent, and which aims to emphasize on the layered and complex character of the social reality. Realists assume that interviews provide them a route to gain access to events, experiences and conditions which signify the different surfaces of the multi-layered social reality (Smith and Elger, 2014). Next, the chapter discusses the practice of semi-structured interviews in the four case studies examined in the UK and Cyprus, and discusses the secondary data as part of the methodology used.

5.3 The fieldwork

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase started in March 2013 in the UK, whilst the second phase followed in July 2013 in Cyprus. This section describes the fieldwork undertaken and the practical issues faced throughout this process. Before moving to the fieldwork discussion though, it is important to identify first the unit of analysis for this research. As Rowley (2002, p.16) argues, ‘the unit of analysis is the basis for the case’. This research uses the shop floor labour process as the unit of analysis for understanding the dynamics and structures that shape the shop floor relations and to unravel the meanings of attendance, as well as the role of line managers within the labour process and the management of attendance.

Before describing the undertaken fieldwork, it is important to refer the international nature of this research and to describe the line managers in the UK and to the Cyprus sites to ensure the comparability between the levels of authority of these actors. As it was described in Chapter 4, the definition of the line manager is complex in the literature, with different authors using different terms to define different actors at different levels. In this research the line managers are the front line managers on the shop floor, to whom non-managerial employees report. As it is described below, there are some differences between the two countries, as well as between the organizations in each country, regarding the responsibilities of the line managers. Nevertheless, as the figure below shows, the level of autonomy of these actors is similar across all cases. Although in the UK, there are more layers of authority in the managerial hierarchy, because of the presence of the team leaders in the pyramid, as well as the role of senior managers on the shop floor, it should be noted

that in Cyprus the line managers' role is a conflation of the UK line managers and team leaders. To explain more, the line managers in Cyprus had the same level of authority as the line managers in the UK, but at the same time, they were responsible to run the shop floor, which responsibility rested on the team/section leaders' role.

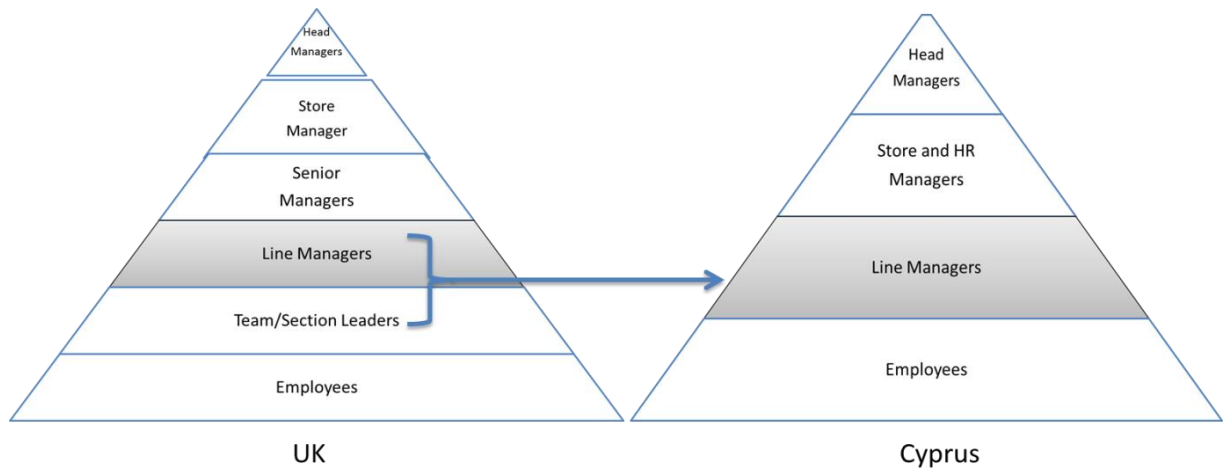


Figure 2: The line managers in the UK and Cyprus

In the UK both organizations, across all the sites examined, the store manager was the responsible of the whole store operations. The store manager was responsible to manage the different departments and collaborate with the managers on the lower level of the ladder, both senior and line managers, in order to meet the targets. Data revealed that responsibilities were devolved to senior and line managers regarding both the commercial and the organizational role. In UK1, the organizational structure showed a multiple level of hierarchy with store manager on the top, followed by the senior managers, who were responsible for the wider store area within which line managers were responsible for their sections, with the support of team leaders. In both organizations, despite the managerial levels, the line managers had to carry out a mixture of tasks regarding their commercial role whilst at the same time they had to manage their team. They had though the support of the team leaders-UK1 or section leaders-UK2. These employees were on the level above employees whose main responsibility was the running of the department. Since the line managers were not present on the shop-floor for the whole shift, not even the checkout line manager, team/section leaders were responsible to manage and monitor their department operations, under the guidance of the managers. The leaders had limited managerial authority they were part of the workforce rather the managerial team. The line managers on the other hand, had to guide the team/section leaders to run the shop floor, meet the

targets and deal with issues that the former actors were not trained to deal with, such as people management for example. The line managers dealt with both commercial and bureaucratic nature of the management job, and were dividing their time in the office and on the shop floor. The team/section leaders reported to the line managers, whilst the latter reported to the senior and the HR managers, depending on the issue. Regarding their HR role and their involvement in absence they had to report to both HR and their manager. Finally, it should be noted that although the team leaders also had direct communication with the employees, the line managers were those that the employees would report and those who helpo the responsibility for any issues within their team.

In Cyprus, unlike to the UK, the line managers were usually present on the shop floor and those who had a direct communication with their staff. In other words, these managers were called to carry out their managerial responsibilities, which as similar to UK line managers, but at the same time they were asked to run the shop floor, in the same way as the UK team/section leaders. They held a variety of responsibilities, dividing their time in between tasks such as managing their team and carrying HR tasks, and tasks related to their commercial role. For example, the checkout managers in Cy1 were responsible for the front-end, as well as to prepare and checkout the restaurant orders, whilst checkout line managers in Cy2 in addition to their checkout and HR tasks were also running the kiosk. What was different in the two Cyprus organizations, compared to the UK, were the layers of hierarchy. The store manager was in both cases, similarly to the UK, responsible for the store operation, whilst the ‘senior managers’ role was absent in Cyprus. The line managers were reporting directly to the store manager. Regarding HR, significant changes were identified between the two Cyprus cases, as it is discussed in more detail below. Briefly, in Cy1 the HR function was centralized with the HR manager being based in the Head office, whilst in Cy2 an HR manager was present in every store. Therefore, in Cy2 the line managers were reporting people management issues, such as absence, to the HR manager, the only senior manager below the store manager. In contrast the line managers in Cy1 tended to report HR issues to the store manager who was responsible to pass the message to the Head HR manager or deal with the issue.

5.3.1 Phase 1: The UK

Two organizations were explored within the UK labelled here as UK1 and UK2. Both UK case study organizations are two of the main players in the global grocery-retail sector,

leaders in the UK market and two of the largest employers in the country. Specifically, UK1 is a multinational grocery retailer, with more than half a million people working in the stores and serving millions of customers across the globe per week. The organization has more than 3,000 stores and employs approximately 300,000 people in the UK. UK2 is owned by a multinational company, which had expanded its business around the world, including the UK. The Parent Company had opened more than 11,000 retail units across the globe, with approximately 500 units located in the UK. More than two million people are employed in this organization with approximately 200,000 employees in the UK.

All the stores examined in this research are located in the west of Scotland. One large store was investigated for UK1, where approximately 600 employees were employed. However, due to access issues I had to visit three stores of UK2 in order to collect the data. In terms of numbers, two of the [large] stores for UK2 had the same number of employees to UK1, whilst the third store, which is located in a rural area, was significantly smaller with 200 employees.

Access in the UK sites was generally difficult to attain. The size of the organizations and the fact that I did not have any personal contacts within any of the UK grocers made the access a time-consuming and stressful process. In each case study I met issues of time and increased workload for participants, which made access to some key responders and gatekeepers impossible. Besides, this was a 'messy' period for supermarkets in the UK as it was not long after the horsemeat scandal.

After access was declined through the Head Quarters, I decided to request access on the store level. An access letter was sent to the store HR managers providing information on the study. The letter was followed by a personal phone call to the managers a week later, to discuss the study in more depth and answer any queries (King, 2004). This was the main process followed to get access in the two UK organizations. I first got my access in UK1 through the valuable help of the former regional HR manager who introduced me to the store manager of the store examined in UK1. In UK2, I sought for access following the same process to a store HR manager who through a snowball effect introduced me to other HR managers in different stores.

However, in UK2 access was initially limited. The first HR manager I met would not allow me more than ten minutes to interview the employees. I then had to think a different strategy to gain access as all my attempts to negotiate more time with this manager failed. I conducted three long interviews with two line managers and a section leader in this store,

whilst it should be noted that I never made it to the employees, not even for the ten minutes promised by the HR manager. I then decided to turn to different stores of this company and through the same process for access, I ended up travelling around three stores in the west of Scotland to get responses to my research. Although this was a long and stressful process, I strongly believe that it provided me a useful insight of the organization and maybe this is something I should have done for UK1. Maybe if I had explored another (smaller) store of UK1 I would understand better the differences or similarities within the same organization. However, due to time, resources, and access limits, this was difficult to happen.

In total 44 interviews were conducted in the two UK cases with participants across the shop floor and at different levels of management, as shown in the table below. This choice was driven by the critical realism propositions for a multi-level analysis in order to gain a better understanding of the problem examined.

	UK1		UK2	
HR managers	2		3	
Senior managers	1		-	
Line managers	3		4	
Union/Colleague representatives	1		1	
Section/Team Leaders	1		2	
Employees	Checkouts	12	Checkouts	3
	Clothing Department	1	Food section	4
	Customer Service	1	Non-food section	3
	Phone shop	1	Customer Service	1
	Total	15	Total	11
Total	23		21	

Table 1: Participants in the UK

As it is obvious from the table above, there is a variation in the number of participants from the different departments, as well as to the different levels of authority. For example, in UK2 more HR managers participated in the research comparing to UK1. The majority of employee participants in UK1 were working on the checkouts, whereas in UK2 the majority of participating employees were working on the shop floor, in both the food and non-food section. These variations are the result of the limited access I had to the front-end in UK2, as the HR and line managers, who were the gatekeepers in all the stores of this organization, refused to move individuals off the front-end to participate in this research, as this would have disrupted the operation of the department. Although I was present in the store on quiet days, they still suggested that checkout was a 'sensitive' department and they needed all the individuals present on the front-end. On the other hand, it was easier to get access to the shop floor employees who though were also trained and often worked on the checkouts to cover absences or help with long queues. Therefore, part of the interview with these employees was the description of the checkout job to overcome this limitation.

Yet again, one should not assume that the selection of the participants was a random one. I followed a purposive sampling, seeking information-rich cases (Patton, 1990) and individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (absence). The idea behind this sampling strategy was to purposefully select participants that would help me understand the problem of this research and answer the research question. Hence, a random sampling based on statistical principles, which suggest the selection of a large number of individuals and sites, as found in quantitative research, was not effective for the purposes of this research (Creswell, 2002). Therefore, my purpose to understand the nature of work across the supermarket shop floor, the management of absence within the organizations, and the role of line managers, required the selection of participants at different positions who were involved in this process (HR, line managers, union reps), as well as individuals who went through the absence process (employees). Indeed, in UK1 employees with a history of absence across the shop floor were selected, in order to understand the dynamics of both the job and the impact on absence decisions in different departments. In UK2 though, although I adopted the same purposive sampling, the barriers of access resulted in a convenience sampling to be used eventually (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The restrictions to the front-end and the fact that the line managers were those who selected the interviewees for me, basically based on who would accept to participate, and who was available for an interview, put limitations on the research. Of course, the participants were free to accept or not to sit in the interview; however, the fact that their

superior asked them to do so sometimes forced them to give the interview. One should be sceptical whether the responses were genuine and whether this toleration of convenience sample in UK2 affected the results. I tried to overcome this limitation through probing questions and by asking employees, whether they preferred to have the interview in a different time or not have it at all. Luckily, no one chose to step away from participation, but only one employee agreed to meet me outside work.

The latter tactic, asking people to meet me outside work, was also a strategy to overcome the limitations put on the duration of the interviews in UK2. Although in UK1 I had no issues with the duration of the interviews, which lasted between 40-90 minutes, in UK2 the gatekeepers put restrictions on the time that the employees could be absent from the shop floor. Particularly, I was allowed up to 20-35 minutes with every employee, whilst there were no time restrictions with the managers. Although in some cases the interviews lasted longer, often the HR manager interrupted the interview to ask the employees to return to their post. Therefore, given the time limitations I had to select carefully my interview content with every employee and develop a different interview guide depending on the participant's position, working contract, and absence history. For example, the interview with participants with a history of high absence was focused on the absence management, whilst for participants who, for example, were working on the checkouts I focused on the nature of work, without, though, neglecting the management of absence within the department. This is not though to argue that I had a set in stone interview guide process, rather I tried to get as much as possible out of the participants within my limited time with them through a more structured discussion. Yet, following my research design and the semi-structured interview method, the participants were free to express their personal issues and thoughts.

All interviews, from both cases, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Recording devices were used, with the permission of the participants (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005). Detailed explanations were given to the interviewees regarding the recording, to make sure that this would not affect the relationship between the two and the results of the research (Saunders et.al, 2009). The main reason for recording was to allow the researcher to focus on listening and questioning the interviewee and enabled the easier interpretation of the data by re-listening to the interview and using quotes to the analysis. Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that recording is necessary to overcome the limitations to our memories and allows a more thorough examination of what people say and the repeated examination of

their answers. Yet, this requires the transcription of the interviews. As Walford (1987, p.95) suggests ‘the transcription turns the original event into data to be entered into a qualitative analysis package and develops a data bank at the touch of a key. In short, the transcript encourages the possibility of the spoken word being taken too seriously’.

Nevertheless, the transcription of forty-four interviews for the UK phase was a time-consuming and a ‘dull’ process. It was not only the bad quality of some recordings due to external noises that impacted on the process, but also the strong Glaswegian accent of some of the participants. Although I was already living in Glasgow the past two years and I was already familiar with the accent, having to transcribe long interviews in a foreign language and in a strong local accent, needed a significant amount of time and effort. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviews were transcribed word by word.

Finally, going back to the international nature of this research it is important to describe the line managers in the UK and Cyprus sites (see below) in order to ensure the comparability between the levels of authority of these actors. As it was described in Chapter 4, the definition of the line manager is complex in the literature, with different authors using different terms to define different actors. In this research the line managers are the front line managers on the shop floor, to whom non-managerial employees report. Yet there are differences in between the two countries.

5.3.2 Phase 2: Cyprus

In Cyprus, the two case study organizations are, similarly to the UK, leaders in the country’s food retail sector, whilst it is worth to mention that Cy2 is a world leader in the global and European food retail market. Cy2 is a multinational grocery-retailer, with more than 15000 company-owned and franchise stores across the globe, with a presence in thirty-three countries and over 350.000 employees working for the organization. The organization entered the Cyprus retail market in 2005 after purchasing 50.1% of the second largest local food retailer. The organization opened its first store in Cyprus in 2006, whilst today it runs 11 stores around the island, where over 1500 individuals are working in the company and it is classified as one of the largest employers in the country. On the other hand, Cy1 is a smaller organization with only six stores and approximately 600 employees. Comparing these numbers to larger European markets such as UK, France, or even Greece, they are indeed extremely small. However, Cy1 is a developing company and steadily increases its market share. It is a leader in its region and over the last three years had invested and expanded its business to other areas of the island, becoming today the

second bigger local food retailer in the country. Besides, with Cyprus having a population standing only at 850,000 - smaller than the population of Birmingham – the small size of the organization should not be a surprise. In fact, the number of employees working across all the stores of Cy1 (600) is slightly higher than the employees occupied only in the one store of UK1 (579 employees). Yet, still Cy1 is considered as a large company in Cyprus. Generally, (food) retail is one of the larger employers in the island, standing behind the public sector, the banking sector, and hospitality services.

Access in Cyprus sites was also not an easy process. Although access was already agreed and guaranteed in Cy1, the current economic climate in the country provided barriers to my access in Cy2. On one hand, Cy1 as my former employer agreed to help me conduct the research within two sites, the Head office and store2, which is located in a tourist area. The rationale of choosing these two stores was their size, the variety of full-time and part-time employees as well as the tourist opening hours. On the other hand, the process to gain access in Cy2 was attempted through the Association of Supermarkets, an organization of which all the food retailers in the country are members. I was in contact with the general officer of the organization who forwarded my access letter to gatekeepers in two organizations, CompanyO and Cy2, with the latter supporting my research and providing me a formal letter that indicated access, whilst the former organization was bankrupted a year later. Therefore, having Cy2's support letter on hand made me believe that access would be easy, since the Head office agreed to 'let me in'. However, when I contacted the organization I found a closed door. The two gatekeepers in the Head office, the head HR manager, and the regional manager never replied back neither to my emails nor to my phone calls or messages. My contact with the Association of Supermarkets kept assuring me that they will 'let me in', but due to time and resources pressures I decided to follow the similar 'letter/call' tactic I followed in the UK to the local store of Cy2. The letter was sent to the store manager and I met him a week later to discuss the research. I had to assure this manager over the ethics code of the research, which stressed the anonymity for both the organization, as well as the participants and emphasized my personal ethics to keep any information for academic purposes. Therefore, in mid-July 2013 I gained my access in Cy2. This store is located in a tourist area, and of course, it was extremely busy during this period. Therefore, I had to spend the whole day in the store and wait for the shop floor to be quiet, whilst often the interviews with the participants were disrupted by the line managers asking for employees to return to their post because of the long queues.

The comparison of the two companies was an interesting one as I have managed to compare the multinational leader and the local leader. The similarities in the business model provided a rich source of data and the fact that the Cy2 store and the Cy1/store2 were located in tourist areas in the southeast area of the island revealed an interesting story regarding the employment relationship within a country with an economy based on the tourist industry. Yet, differences and similarities were identified within the stores. The most striking was the HR structure and the presence of an HR manager in every store of Cy2, in contrast to Cy1. In fact, in Cy1, unlike any other organization examined in this research, both in the UK and Cyprus, there was an absence of store HR managers. The HR manager was based only in the Head store, therefore it was interesting to examine whether this dynamic had differences between not only to the other organizations but also within the organization per se.

In total 46 interviews were contacted in the Cyprus sites, 25 in Cy1 and 21 in Cy2 respectively. The table below shows the positions and the numbers of the participants within the two organizations. Similarly to the UK, a multi-level analysis was followed, aiming for the better and deeper understanding of the problem examined.

	Cy1	Cy2	
HR managers	-	1	
Senior managers	3 Head Store: 2 Store2: 1	1	
Line managers	4 Head Store: 2 Store2: 2	4	
Employees	Checkouts: 18 Head Store: 11 Store2: 7	Checkouts	12
		Non-food section	3
Total	25	21	

Table 2: Participants in the Cyprus organizations

The majority of participating employees in both organizations were working in the checkout department, whilst line managers from both the checkouts and the shop floor

departments were interviewed. Additionally, in Cyprus I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with store managers, one in Cy1, and one in Cy2, unlike to the UK where the store managers were inaccessible. This provided useful insight regarding the organization of work within the organizations, the authority of line managers within this process and generally in people management, as well as to understand the relationship between the Head offices and the particular stores. Nevertheless, I faced issues in interviewing members of the top management team such as the store manager in Cy2 and the HR manager in Cy1. Both claimed high workload and avoided talking to me. Regarding the former, although I did not manage to interview this store's store manager, I collected the insight of a different store manager, which eventually proved the consistency strategy in managing people across the organization. In Cy1, the fact I could not get access to interview the HR manager is a major drawback of the research since it fails to understand the HR specialist's perspective on the issues examined.

In Cy2, a convenience sampling had to be followed. Similarly, to UK2, in Cy2 the line managers were those who chose which employees to interview. Their choice was not though a case of hiding something from the researcher; rather it was based on the flow of customers in the store. When the store was quiet, the employee who was not serving a customer was the next in the queue to be interviewed. Besides, the limited number of employees in the store and particularly after the recession and the recent redundancies allowed me to interview the majority of participants on the checkouts. One could rationally ask the question why only the checkouts, since the shop floor is the unit of analysis. The answer though is simple and this was because the majority of employees in both cases were now only working on the checkouts. The shop floor employees were limited. For example, in Cy2, only five employees were working on the shop floor and two of them were interviewed, whilst in Cy1/store2 there was only one employee on the shelves. On the other hand, a purposive sampling strategy was followed in Cy1. In this organization, I had the opportunity to choose which employees I would interview. Although the manager was still the person who chose the individual, this choice was driven under the criteria of the sampling strategy, which are similar to the ones described in the UK.

Additionally, language was another issue that I had to deal with during the Cyprus phase. It is important to note that language was an issue with the employees whose Greek was not their mother tongue, and those were the majority of the participants, especially in Cy1. In both cases, the majority of employees were either immigrants from the Eastern Europe

(Bulgaria) or Pontic-Greeks. Pontic-Greeks are an ethnically Greek group who traditionally lived in the region of Pontus-shores of Turkey's Black Sea and the edge of Caucasus. They are also found in Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine. They hold Greek passports, but their mother tongue is Russian. They started immigrating to Cyprus in the late 1990s, where they had developed strong communities. This group was found to work in food retail (females) and construction (males) sectors. Mason (2002, p.64) notes that 'the interview method is heavily dependent on people's capacities to verbalize, interact, conceptualize and remember'. This was not completely achieved by the immigrant participants who were facing difficulties to express themselves in Greek, whilst their answers were usually one word response of 'Yes' or 'No'. I had to probe deeply to manage to extract valid responses through these interviews.

Furthermore, as it is already stated this research is cross-national, aiming to compare results from the UK and Cyprus. The fact that these two countries speak different language, English and Greek respectively, also raises an issue of validity. More specifically, the transcripts that were developed from the interviews in Cyprus needed to be translated in English for two main reasons: Firstly, because the whole research is written in English, and secondly, translation is required to provide logical comparisons between the two sets of data. However, the translation might introduce some validity issues. For, instance, the question that first rises is: who will translate the transcripts?, and secondly, how is the researcher going to ensure that the translation is accurate and delivers all the meanings of the interview? This is one example of an issue, which rises through the utilization of interviews, as the method is based on words, and in the case that a meaning is not translated accurately, it changes the data and affects the validity and reliability of the research. The answer to these questions is a simple one, which also raises questions. I did not translate the whole transcripts in English rather only the data used as part of the findings chapters. The translation was dealt carefully to carry out the meanings of the Cypriot participants, and although I acknowledge that some meanings might change when translated, this is unavoidable in cross-national research between countries with different language.

5.3.3 Secondary Data

Again, as part of the case study strategy design followed in this research, in conjunction to the critical realism preference on pluralism in the methodology (Smith and Elger, 2014), a variety of secondary data were collected in combination with the semi-structured

interviews. As discussed above the research was conducted in two phases, the UK, and the Cyprus phase. The secondary data collection followed this pattern of the two phases.

Starting with the UK phase, I managed to get access to organizational documents of the two companies, which were used as complementary to the primary interview data to generate an agenda regarding the management of absence within the two UK organizations. In UK1, the store HR manager provided me with the complete and detailed 'Attendance Guide' and all the documents that were used in the different attendance meetings. This was used as a parallel source for the participants' descriptions regarding the management of absence in the organization, and it was a vital source to gain a better understanding of the procedure and the positioning of attendance within the employment relations discussion. In UK2, the managers have provided me only the 'employee handbook', whilst the participant managers refused to give me access to other formal organizational documents. Although the employee handbook provided some basic information regarding the absence policy, the employee rights and the flexibility approach taken by the organization regarding the management of absence, more documents, such as the formal attendance policy booklet would have provided a deeper understanding of the process and would enable a more depth critical review of the approach towards managing absence. Nevertheless, some of these limitations were covered through the interviews with particularly the four participating HR managers who were asked repeatedly to explain in detail the policy. Additionally, in order to verify the terms and conditions of the employees in these two organizations I asked the HR managers to provide me a copy of an employment contract. This would allow me to verify the statements emerged through the interviews especially regarding the working time. However, the answer was, although polite, strictly negative because, as they argued, contracts include personal details which cannot be published.

In Cyprus, I came across the surprising fact that the organizations did not keep any formal records regarding people management and particularly absence management. In Cy1, the organization provided to the researcher a USB memory stick that included all the policies and procedures of the company. These documents included mainly quality policies, which were in limited help for this research, yet it was a formal confirmation of the absence of a formal attendance policy. The organization provided me though other written documents, such as a formal employment contract, copies of the employment law for supermarkets and two formal letters produced by the HR manager that were related to the management of

absence and working time. Any personal information was deleted by the HR manager from all the documents, to protect the individuals' privacy. These data provided a useful insight to understand the employment relationship within the organization and the approach of the organization towards working time issues. On the other hand, in Cy2 access was a major issue. I came across a uniform denial by the management team, both in the store examined, as well as in the head office, to provide any formal documents. Therefore, I had to go through the organization's website to try to find any data available. However, unsurprisingly, the company did not publish any data regarding absence and people management in general. I then tried to get in touch with trade unions within Cyprus, as well as abroad (where the parent company is based) to provide me any documents related to the management of absence or employment relationship within the company. On response to this request I never received a response back from any of the unions abroad, whilst the trade unions in Cyprus confirmed their limited access in the particular organization as well. Therefore, in Cy2 no secondary data were of any use within this research, which, though, it should not be regarded as a significant issue. Firstly, there was the absence of a formal policy in the organization; therefore, no documents were available regarding absence beside the employment law that was already acquired by Cy1 and the unions. Also the uniformity of employee relations within the sector, which was regulated by the 'Regulation of the operation of shops and the Employment Terms' as developed by the Cyprus government, provided the necessary data to gain a broader understanding of the employment relationship with the company and triangulate these to the interview data.

5.4 Data Analysis

Following the semi-structured interview method, an interview guide was developed, based on four broad themes: the nature of work, the management of absence, the manifestation of absence within the labour process and finally the role of line managers in managing attendance. These four broad themes were used to develop specific interview topics and to the formulation of the interview questions. It should be noted that different interview guides were being formulated for different participants, depending on their level of authority and their role within the organization. Particularly, different interview guides were developed for the HR managers, senior managers, line managers, union representatives, and employees. Across the two countries, a similar structure was followed across the groups of participants in all the cases, to be able to develop a comparative bank of data. However, the interview questions were adapted to the participants' responses, the

particular case study organization and of course the available time with interviewees. Appendix 1 includes the interview guides for HR managers, line managers, and employees. Additionally, it should be noted that the thematic analysis was also followed within the secondary data phase.

The four broad themes were the backbone of the data analysis in this research. Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that one of the most difficult processes with qualitative methods is the analysis of the data. The large amount of information and the vague pictures emerging through the data make the interpretation and analysis complex. Therefore, by dividing the research and the findings into these four broad categories and themes provided a structure through the analysis phase in an attempt to manage the vast amount of data as the critical realist doctrine suggests.

The literature presents various strategies of qualitative methods analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2007, Keegan, 2007; Saunders et al., 2007). Particularly, Saunders et al.,(2009) divide the analysis strategies according to the research approach adopted by the researcher, whilst Miles and Huberman (1994) present an interactive model for analysing data, which was followed in this research.

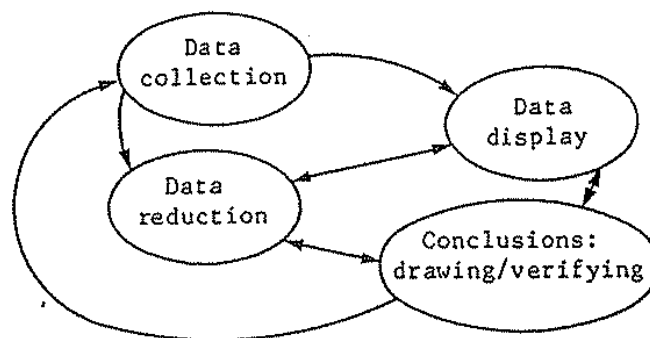


Figure 3: Components of data analysis: Interactive model (copied from Miles and Huberman (1994;12))

The most widely used strategy to analyse qualitative data, the thematic analysis, was followed in order to achieve a deep analysis of the collected data. Miles and Huberman (1984) discuss a process they call ‘pattern coding, whilst Strauss and Corbin (1990) present a variety of different strategies for coding data within a grounded theory approach. However, despite the different approaches and the terminology within the literature, coding as a method has a common emphasis on how to categorize data and make connections between categories. These tasks constitute the core of qualitative analysis as Dey (1993) suggests.

Therefore, the “Coding Tool” (data reduction) in this research was used to organize and analyze the transcripts produced across the four cases, which were more than 100.000 words long. Particularly, the process of open, axial and selective coding was used in order to disaggregate data to recognize relationships between themes and produce integrative categories (Saunders et al., 2009, p.509). Auerbach (2003, p.31) suggests that one cannot see patterns within the transcripts by just reading them and proposes the coding method as a procedure for organizing the text of the transcripts, and discovering patterns within them.

The analysis of the data started after the completion of the fieldwork and the transcription of all the ninety-one interviews and the data were analysed in two phases, the UK and the Cyprus phase. Using the conceptual framework and the research objectives of this research the main themes of the research were categorized and coded in detail. This process of coding was subject to revision. The vast amount of data required a strategic and careful development master codes and sub-codes in order to be able to organize the emerging findings and be able to provide a comparison not only between the two counties but also across the different cases. Besides, as Miles and Huberman (1994) argue, giving explanations of causality in human affairs is a complex process and the case is not just to describe the differences and similarities across multiple networks. The analysis within this research followed such a process, which allowed the development of a (multipart) matrix that identified the conceptual themes across the different cases and allowed the theoretical comparison. Shortly, starting with the broad four themes and breaking them down to smaller more detailed categories, through a coding and re-coding strategy, the analysis subsumed the codes into fewer bins. Although I faced a struggle to ‘let data go’, which is a common problem for early researchers who, as Auerbach (2003, p.31) argue, ‘believe that *everything* is important’ [emphasis original], the revision of the codes and the choice on which data to used, always following the conceptual problematic of this research, were crucial steps for the development of theory.

5.5 The researcher’s reflexivity and limitations

This study presents some limitations, which need to be recognized. Throughout this chapter, I discussed a number of limitations regarding the access to the organizations, the time pressures, and the financial limitations. However, I cannot neglect my personal value biases emerging from being a Cypriot white male in my late 20s. My gender, age, culture and of course, the language might have affected the research outcomes.

Smith and Elger (2014) discuss the active role of the researcher within the process and as Maxwell (1996, p.91) suggests, 'eliminating the actual influence of the researcher is impossible'. Therefore, this has to be acknowledged. Unlike to positivists who believe that the researcher bias can be controlled, for critical realism the researchers are part of the research and bring in their personal values, beliefs and dispositions which might be different of participants. This is an inherent problem in the research relationship which should not be neglected (Maxwell, 2012b). In other words, as Maxwell (1996) notes in qualitative study the aim of the researcher is not to eliminate his or her influence but to understand it and use it productively.

This is particular the case of interviews where the researcher has a major impact on the outcomes. Maxwell provides some techniques to limit and control the impact of the researcher during the interviews such for example to avoid asking leading questions, while Smith and Elger (2014) suggest probing questions as the strategy to overcome resistance or vagueness in participants responses, and therefore gaining more valid results. The authors conclude that the researcher needs to be focused on specific events rather than generalities and to encourage responders to compare their experiences of different events, to probe for details, which are to be compared with other sources. Therefore, although triangulation is not a validation testing per se, it can be useful to overcome, to an extent, threats of human reflexivity when it is combined with probing, without though fully eliminating the researcher's influence on the process. In this research, my personal reflexivity is a more complex situation. Particularly, the multinational comparison of case studies and the conduction of the research in different national and cultural frameworks undeniably impact on the interview situation, as well as the analysis of the data.

For example, regarding the UK phase, not being an English native speaker myself unavoidably influenced the interviews. The fact that I speak English as a second language undeniably had an impact on the interviews in the UK from both the researcher and the participant's view. The participants accent was sometimes difficult to understand, whilst my accent was also somehow a barrier during the interview. In addition, in this country I interviewed people, both males and females, both younger and older than me, who had different working and life experiences to myself. This had an impact on the way participants answered the questions and their willingness to reveal sensitive data.

Similarly, in Cyprus, where the participants were mainly middle age, immigrant women, language, age, and gender influenced the interviews. In fact, to overcome this issue I often

had to adopt the ‘young student’ status to make the older participants feel more comfortable during the interview, and at the same time for younger participants, I had to adopt the status of a friend, close to their age, to avoid any defensive attitudes towards my questions. Moreover, the fact that many participants were not native speakers (Greek) influenced their explanation of events and their ability to verbalize their account, whilst the translation of the Cyprus data in English included the risk of losing the meaning of the responses.

Finally, the limited access to some sites also had an impact on this research. This is related mainly to UK2 where the access to participants was subjected to time restrictions, as well as to Cy2 where the access to the head office managers was impossible. Particularly for the latter, I recognize that I missed valuable insights regarding the problematic of this research, since the HR was a centralized facet of the organization and it was regulated by policies set by the parent company to which only the head office managers had access.

6. Understanding the nature of work

The chapter examines the political, economic and social structures within the grocery retail sector. It explores the changes in the sector's political economy in the era of austerity, provides a deeper understanding of the lean regime of food retailing, and explains the impact on the nature of work. This chapter sets the terrain within which the four cases operate and identifies the dynamics that shape the contested nature of work in grocery retailing. The nature of work within the UK will firstly be examined before presenting findings from the Cyprus cases. Firstly, the lean regime and the pressures for lower costs are discussed for each country. This is followed by a discussion regarding the working time, the nature of the food retail job and the role of both the customers and the line managers on the shop floor.

6.1 The UK Cases: The Lean Regime

This section draws on findings from two of the 'Big four' players in the UK food-retail market. The two case study organizations are two of the main players in the global grocery-retail sector; they are leaders in the UK market and two of the largest employers in the country. As was discussed in the methodology, UK1 is a multinational grocery retailer, whereas UK2 is owned by a multinational company, one which has expanded its business around the world, including the UK. It is important to highlight that the two case study organizations are part of a highly competitive market which is dominated by four supermarket chains, within which the lower prices and, of course, the lower costs are the drivers to remain competitive.

6.1.1 Pressure to cut labour costs

The two UK case study organizations were involved in a 'retail-war', within a globalized market, which was characterized by high competition and high pressures for lower costs. One HR Manager in UK2 argued: 'everything is driven by cost...it is a low cost business...everybody is predominantly driven by cost and sales'. It was found that both companies had developed strategies to achieve lower costs through global networks, the introduction of state-of-art technology and the control of labour costs.

Firstly, data revealed that the international nature of the market and the global networks across the supply chain gave power to these retailers over the product price. This was particularly evident in the UK2, which gained power through the global networks of its parent company. One HR Manager in UK2 discussed the advantages of being part of an international family and referred to the influence and control on the costs and the product

price.

Secondly, the up-to-date technology found in the organizations provided them significant cost benefits. Technological upgrades were evident in each company and viewed as key to the successful running of its operations, whilst participants discussed the bigger size of the stores and the faster pace of work. These technological advances, particularly those introduced in the last two decades, had a dramatic impact on the organization of work and generated pressures on the workforce to adapt to the new IT systems. One team-leader in UK2, who started as a checkout operator, described the stages of change on the front-end as 'scary'. She discussed the automatization of work and reported feelings of anxiety and fear by workers towards the computerization of the checkout job. She did, however, conclude that technology led to simpler and faster customer service. Yet, in both cases, the technological advancements on the shop floor had a tangible impact on workforce numbers, as redundancies were found to be an unavoidable outcome and a strategy to reduce costs.

The store HR Manager in UK1 discussed the need for fewer employees on the shop floor as a result of the recession. Similarly, one employee (UK2) argued: 'the department is not as busy as it used to be...Now it's less folks doing the same job'. Whilst the global recession could explain some of the reduction in the net profits of the organizations and the necessity to reduce costs through redundancies, the introduction of technology led to job displacements and reductions in the size of the workforce. Thus, the evidenced reduction in employee numbers was not solely a result of the recession but was also the outcome of up-to-date technology and the automatization of tasks.

The most striking example was the mechanization of service on the front-end. In both case studies, the organizations invested in mechanical customer service devices and introduced customer self-scanning. The introduction of the self-scan areas was in both organizations an emerging cost saving strategy. The customers scanned and packed their shopping without the direct involvement of a member of staff. Only one employee was present at the self-scan area and was responsible for six checkouts. The savings on labour costs were significant, comparing to checkouts where the employees served one customer at a time. Leading on from this, one HR Manager in UK2 suggested that the introduction of new technology has meant there is less need for human resources to carry out particular tasks.

Undeniably, new technology, which had a knock-on effect in terms of the need for less labour and the availability of fewer working hours, were part of a larger cost-cutting exercise. The changes in the economy and the financial pressures on organizations brought the management of cost to the forefront. One HR Manager in UK2 argued that the culture of the organization had always been customer service. However, the changes in the economy necessitated the provision of high quality in customer service with lower costs. The organization strained to provide lower prices to the customer and felt that this could only be achieved through the control of cost. The same HR Manager discussed these cost control measures and the challenge of providing high quality customer service within a strict budget. This clearly demonstrated the importance of cost for the organization. Both organizations were facing increased pressures to keep costs low and simultaneously to offer high quality of customer service.

Labour was identified as the key cost for both companies. Although, the global networks and the technology provided cost benefits, both organizations aggressively pursued lean staffing procedures. According to the Regional HR Manager-UK1 'the business works on a cost basis and HR has to be able to understand the cost of it. HR has to influence the wider business around how we do things'. It was apparent that the labour cost was a major concern for both organizations and this was reflected in the strict budgets for wages and overtime pay, the structure of working schedules, the way working shifts were allocated, and of course, the management of absence.

In both organizations the schedule for the shifts, particularly on the checkouts, was based on sales and the number of customers in the store. Both organizations used sophisticated software to control labour costs, by calculating how many working hours were required per day. Based on the predicting sales, the software specified the number of employees required in each shift. This information was available to line managers who managed the day-to-day business and prepared the rotas three weeks in advance. Thus, the attempts to control labour costs with a focus on wages, depended on technology, whereas the costly working schedule was based on a mathematic algorithm. Furthermore, the lean environment of grocery retailing affected the working time through the necessity to manage the labour costs and the use of technology allowed both organizations to tightly control the wage budget and limit waste on labour.

Absence was also regarded by managers in both cases as a source of cost. Absence costs were related to the managers' time spent dealing with the issue and the additional costs for

covering sick colleagues, which impacted on line managers' weekly budgets and the overall budget of the store. The UK1 Regional HR Manager suggested the close monitoring of absence so that each store would know how much it spent on absence individually. Similarly, an HR Manager in UK2 stressed that absence was very expensive and also commented that absence is something that was closely measured to see 'what the real wages are [and] what we really waste'.

The participants, in both cases, acknowledged that there was more emphasis on absence because of the impact it had on the business. An HR Manager-UK2 commented that absence was more closely monitored today due to the costs related to that behaviour. Likewise, one employee in UK1 argued that the organization could not afford any absences and recognized the tight budgets of the departments commenting: "*they want every single penny of every single member of staff*". This links back to the tight budgets for wages and overtime pay. In both cases, there was no additional overtime budget beside the wage budget, which was managed by the line managers who were not allowed to spend more funds than the allotted budget on overtime. This however generated issues within the departments across the two organizations, especially in the cases where managers could not afford to cover shifts because of high absence. Nevertheless, both organizations had developed similar controls to manage the cost of absence. These emerged through the formal absence policy, which in both cases [described in detail below] required employees who were off sick to call in before their comeback shift to confirm their return. This demonstrated that both organizations were trying to predict wages and absence costs through avoiding having more people on the shop floor than the number indicated by the software.

6.1.2 Working Time and Flexibility

Data revealed that both organizations were using part-time employees to cover their labour needs. The store HR manager in UK1 discussed the domination of part-time work on the shop floor over the last ten years, with 70% of the workforce working part-time, a percentage that had dramatically increased as no full-time employees were recruited in this store in the past two years. In both organizations, the part-time employment of females and young students was key to the labour force structure. This is related to the discussion of lower costs as the two organizations took advantage of the flexibility and the less working hours offered to part-time workers.

Part-time employment was also related to “flexibility” which was crucial to operations in both case studies. The Regional HR manager of UK1 discussed the need for part-time employment to respond to peaks in business, and commented on the changing nature of the retail environment, particularly the increase in night shopping. Therefore, the domination of part-time workers in the two organizations, from a flexibility point of view, was related to the changing nature of food retail and the changing shopping habits of the UK customers. It was not surprising that three out of four stores visited as part of this research operated 24/7. This data demonstrates that the sector was facing constant changes, with customers demanding longer opening hours. Consequently, as the managers argued, both organizations, responded to this demand by utilizing part-time employment to achieve flexibility and adapt to the new requirements of the market, especially during the economic crisis. It should not be a surprise that UK1 had limited recruitment at the time when the research was conducted. Part-time employment dominated the food retail shop floor for three main purposes: to match staffing to customer flows in the stores, to cover weekend and night shifts and to take advantage of the lower wages and benefits offered to part-time workers.

Nevertheless, new types of part-time contracts emerged through the data. In particular, UK1 had introduced the so-called ‘flexi-contract’ to achieve flexibility, which was a common and fundamental strategy for the organization of work in UK1. This new working scheme was different from the typical part-time employment structure found in UK2. UK1 developed the ‘flexi-contract’ to provide flexibility to the business as well as to drive down costs.

Flexi-contracts were most commonly constructed for young employees and students who required flexibility in their working hours to meet their university circumstances. These employees usually worked on weekends when the shop floor was busy, and on night shifts, which was less suitable for older, part-time, or full-time employees. The flexi-contracts were extended based on the needs of the organization. Employees were asked at short notice to work additional hours to their contracted hours in order to cover labour needs, manage customer flow, and cover absences. However, these contracts should not be confused with the zero-hour contracts. These contracts were similar to zero-hours contracts in that they were used to cover last minute labour needs. These ‘flexi-employees’, however, were guaranteed minimum contracted hours which could be extended depending on the needs of the organization. As one of the respondents reported, the organization

relied on the flexi-contracts to help them with busy periods such as weekends and particularly the first weekend of the month, as well as periods such as Christmas. Nonetheless, this is not to say that employees who were engaged under different terms and conditions and different types of contracts were not asked to take overtime or cover shifts. Yet, what differentiated the flexi-contracts was that it was mandatory for these employees to take overtime and cover shifts, as this was part of their terms and conditions. A flexi-contract employee argued:

‘They phone people to come in to help them for that day...and usually these are flexi contracts; they rely on them to help. [But] I'm thinking that I'm getting called in whenever they please and they [full-timers] don't need to.’(E8.UK1)

Clearly, it was not a requirement for those not on flexi-contracts to take overtime and cover extra shifts. The organization used this flexibility scheme as a safety net to cover absences and to manage the business needs on the shop floor on peak days and hours. Nevertheless, as one employee (E14.UK1) said: ‘*You have to do some; you have to be available and willing to do some*’. This, though, was beyond employees’ willingness to adjust their working hours and accept overtime hours. Rather, it goes to the level that the organization secured overtime through terms and conditions, forcing flexi-contracted workers to extend their shifts. In particular, flexi-contracted workers argued: ‘*you need to do it...at the end of the day it is your job so you can't just say, “I'm not going [to], you just have to go and do it”*’ (E8.UK1). This data demonstrated the unorthodox strategy developed by UK1 to either cover overtime-working hours or to cover unplanned absences or unwanted shifts. The new flexibility contract was the spare wheel that was available to the manager at any time. Employees were not ‘allowed’ to refuse overtime very often, even if they had a legitimate reason not to extend their contracted hours.

This generated feelings of unfairness and pressure to establish availability, which inevitably led to levels of frustration. This aspect of the employment relationship was clearly reflected in participant’s responses referring to the condition of compulsive overtime as extremely irritating and unfair. One flexi-employee argued:

‘Most of the time she [the manager] would say, "Because you are flexi it is your duty...you need to work these [hours]". That's a bit of unfair. (E8.UK1)’

The union representative discussed the uncertainty of the working hours accompanied with this contract. She argued that the young employees often did not understand the contract they had signed until they experienced the pressure by managers to accept overtime. Unquestionably, the new flexibility contract was affecting the employment relationship to the extent that employees were ‘forced’ to extend their working hours; a fact that generated uncertainty in their working and personal life. It is fair to say that the unpredictability of their working lives was having a detrimental impact on their personal lives.

6.1.3 The ‘Beeping’ Job and the intensification of work

6.1.3.1 The monotony of the job

Respondents characterized grocery-retail jobs as repetitive, with the ‘dreary’ elements of the job being seen as inherent to the nature of work. One employee-UK2 commented: *‘I could see it be[ing] quite repetitive...but I think that's just the nature of the job’*. Respondents in both organizations, particularly on the front-end/checkouts, spoke about the limited variety of tasks in their job which resulted in monotony in their working day. Monotony and boredom were aspects of the job that were unavoidable and intrinsic to the nature of work. This is reflected by one employee in UK2 with 30 years of working experience in grocery who stated, *‘to be bored, it's part of the job, it comes with the job.’* Managers were found to be impotent, in that they could not alleviate the feelings of boredom. A team leader in UK1 described the checkout work as ‘mind-numbing’, extremely boring, and uninspiring. Similar views were gained through employee interviews across the two cases. The majority of respondents described the front-end job as boring, repetitive, and unchallenging. Nonetheless, this view was similar to employees who were not working on the checkouts on a permanent basis. Both organizations were using the so-called ‘relief-cashiers’/‘queue-busters’, who were employees working in other departments and supported checkouts when they were busy. These employees discussed the boredom and monotony of the checkouts in comparison to their own department. For example, a part-time student who worked in the ‘Music and Video’ department in UK2, when asked, *‘How you find the checkout[s] [job]?’* responded:

‘Boredom. I suppose you use your brain even less. You just sit and scan stuff through...in my department...there is more stuff to do [than] just sit there and scan stuff...I'm on the shop floor which is more interesting than sitting there’ (E3.UK2).

Similarly, a part-time employer on the Customer Service desk in UK1 who started on the checkouts, compared her job to the checkout operator role, suggesting that customer service was more interesting than 'sit[ting] down on a till'. She reported a greater variety of tasks making her job more interesting, although both posts dealt with customers. The customer service officer discussed the freedom of mobility she had on the customer service desk, compared to checkout operators. A similar view was reported by a front-end employee who worked exclusively on the self-scan area who had freedom to move and a greater variety of tasks.

The limited variety of tasks on the checkouts was the main reason participants in both cases described the job as repetitive and boring. This 'robotization' of the job was an element that was found to be an issue across the shop floor with one line manager in UK2 commenting, *'there will be repetition in every job in the store'*. However, the element of boredom was not universally viewed as negative across the shop floor. As one employee (UK2) reported: *'it's too busy, definitely too busy to be boring'*. Employees in both cases found the job to be repetitive but stated that they preferred the shop to be busy than quiet as this helped them to cope with boredom: *'hours [are] just flying [when it's busy]'*, said one checkout employee in UK1. This view was common across different departments in both organizations. Similarly to the latter responder, employees in different departments, in both cases, have reported similar opinions suggesting when the shop floor was busy they *'spent less time looking at the clock'* and the shift passed quicker, whereas a quiet day was described as a *'long day'*.

6.1.3.2 The intensification of service

One should not neglect the demanding nature of the food retail job and the impact on working life. In contrast to the arguments above, participants reported feelings of pressure, especially when the shop floor was busy. As one union representative argued, *'Retail is a very pressurized business... [they] always demand more than you can do and it's just the nature of the beast I'm afraid.'* This was reflected by feelings of stress, particularly on the front-end in busy periods such as weekends and Christmas.

The data provided strong evidence that the food retail job is more intensified than ever before. The introduction of the self-scan areas evidenced the attempts by the two organizations to reduce costs with less employees required to serve more customers. The customer was involved in the labour process doing their own scanning and packing of their shopping. However, this did not put less pressure on the employees; rather it intensified

their role on the shop floor and generated higher pressures. The participants reported the increasing responsibility in these areas and the multiple tasks that they had to carry out. For example, in UK1, only one employee was present in this area in each shift, and they were required to monitor six self-scan tills, whilst at the same time had to provide customer satisfaction. Evidence showed that customers were keen to use self-scanning, which increased the workload of the employees present on this area. UK1 provided plans to 'double-up' the self-scan area by bringing in another employee who would work exclusively on self-scan checkouts. However, the focus on lower costs meant that those plans had to be scrapped, leaving self-scan employees alone with an extreme amount of tasks to be completed. These included monitoring and guiding customers to follow the self-scanning process properly, ensuring that customers scanned all their items and making sure that security procedures were followed for items such as DVDs and alcohol.

The introduction of self-scan areas in these two organizations is evidence of the fast-pace of the industry and the need for lower costs by serving more customers in less time and with less labour costs. A self-scan employee-UK1 described the interaction with more than one customer in this area; contradictorily to tills where employees were focused on serving one customer at a time. This demonstrates the intensification of service work with employees reporting the pressures and the impact on their working life, describing it as '*absolute chaos*'.

Similarly, participants in both organizations who worked on tills discussed the number of customers 'queuing' to be served and their feelings of anxiety and stress. They expressed their frustration for not been able to leave their till - not even to use the toilet when the store was full and often they felt that '*there [wasn't] enough folks on checkouts (E11.UK2)*'. In both organizations, employees reported stress and pressure in busy periods. Even though feelings of stress were reported by employees who worked across the shop floor in both cases, it was a particular problem for checkout employees. This can be explained by the distinct nature of the checkout job and the direct interaction with the customer.

These data provided confirmatory evidence that the busy shop floor had a two-fold explanation for the participants in these two case studies. Firstly, a busy store was perceived as a coping mechanism to the monotonous retail job but it was also a source of pressure and stress. Employees expressed feelings of frustration and exhaustion, leading to anger and apathy. One employee (UK2) commented: '*if you are really stressed...you don't*

put as much effort in it because you just go "why should I work harder?"'. Therefore, the challenging nature of the supermarket job and the intensification of customer service impacted on employees' well-being and their working life.

6.1.3.3 The customer service and the targets

Customers were not detached from the nature of retail work. In both cases, the customer held a pivotal role in the changing nature of food retailing and the organization of work as this was driven by customer service standards. In both organizations, participants on the front-end described their job as a customer service job, acknowledging that their main responsibility was the customer satisfaction.

Evidence revealed an emphasis on high quality service with strict procedures in place regarding customer complaints for employees who did not deliver the 'standard of service', as defined by Head Office. In both cases, Head Office had developed an agenda of good service and required employees to follow these 'service imperatives'. Managers generated pressures on their subordinates to meet the targets and technology was the instrument that measured and evaluated success or failure. Both organizations had developed mechanisms to control 'service quality', such as mystery shoppers, scanning rates monitoring and idle time monitoring. Additionally, direct observations by managers on how the employees interacted with customers were also a common practice. However, these mechanisms generated frustration and feelings of stress for employees.

The target setting by the organizations was strongly related to the changing nature of food retailing, the increasing power of the customer and the necessity for cost reduction. Different departments had their own types of targets. For example, a participant from the grocery department in UK2, whose main job was to 'stock the shelves', discussed the 'speed factor' as the main target in his department. He suggested that a good job depends on how it looks at the end, as well as how quickly it is completed.

Evidence corroborated the notion that in both organizations, the checkouts had the more challenging targets and this was related to the daily and constant interaction with customers. In this department, targets were closely monitored and measured through technology and the electronic data gathered through the checkout operational system. Again, in this department, speed also seemed to be the main driver for target setting. The organizations measured the items the employees scanned per minute (scanning rate) as well as the time the employee spent receiving money from the customer and giving their

change back (idle time). Even though these targets varied between the two organizations, in both cases the line managers were responsible for monitoring them.

A closer look at the data indicated that the challenging targets and the 'fast pace' monitoring through the challenging targets engendered frustration in the workforce. One of the employees on the front-end/UK1 said: *'they say quickly; but it is a laborious job, it takes time'* expressing the feelings of pressure for speed on customer service. However, there was a contradiction between the goals of high quality on customer service and the tight measures for speed. Participants in both cases argued that the requirements for speed were affecting the quality of customer service, transferring the pressure and stress to the customer.

Finally, in both cases, the crucial target of queues was the 'glue' that brought everything together. The targets and the need for speed on checkouts were emerging through the intolerance of the organizations to 'customer queuing'. Yet, both organizations had developed controls to 'tackle' queues. The most common used practice in both organizations was the so-called 'relief cashiers' or 'queue busters'. Even though the terminology was different within the two organizations, the idea remained the same. The main scope of these calls was, for both companies, to control the busy shop floor, control the long queues and consequently stay within the targets set by the Head Offices. As one employee (UK1) argued: *'you get a lot of reliefs and that's quite smart...it gets rid of all the queues and that keeps them green'*.

This queue control tool mechanized by the management generated frustration and tensions between the employees and their managers. In both organizations it was found that employees could not refuse to sit on checkouts as relief cashiers stating that *'they would shout for relief cashier and see if you didn't go they would come and get you (E7.UK1)'*. The employees could not 'escape' this task and were forced to provide help on the front-end. Nevertheless, at the same time they received rebuke by their direct line managers for not completing their departmental job. Employees were caught between the clashing authorities of their department's manager and the checkout manager. As one stated:

'Sometimes your manager says, "don't go there" and the checkout manager would come and say, "you go on a till". I can't have myself in the middle, so I go to the till' (E7.UK1).

6.1.3.3.1 Customer Interaction: a dual role

Evidence suggested that pressure emerged from the interaction with the customer, especially in cases where they were demanding and difficult to handle. Incidences of bullying by customers were a daily reality within stores in each company. Often, customers verbally abused employees. As one participant commented: *'they call you an idiot, [they] call you everything'* (E6.UK1). Research showed that employees were verbally abused for 'doing their job' and following the processes set by the organizations. The customers who were not satisfied with these procedures used tactics of bullying towards the front-end operators such as cursing and swearing, which had a tremendous impact on employees' personal well-being, as well as their perception of the job.

Employees were incapable of reacting to this behaviour due to the authoritarian regime of food retailing. It was apparent that the organizations' focus was on customer service. This, coupled with tight controls and intolerance towards customer complaints, gave customers the space to exercise power over workers. Employees discussed the powerlessness to counter a rude customer. A checkout operator in UK2 reported how the insulting customer behaviour generated feelings of annoyance and intentions of absence. He argued that customers should not be rude to someone who did a *'rubbish job'* and a job they did not want to do. He continued:

'Don't be rude to somebody who is getting paid six pounds per hour to put stuff on the shelves for you...it makes you not want to come in to work if you are gonna be stand[ing] there with rude customers all the time.' (E1.UK2)

The interaction with customers was a storewide phenomenon, although, in both companies, it happened to a smaller extent in other departments than checkouts. The customer's behaviour was unavoidably a source of anxiety and dissatisfaction and possibly one of the main factors that contributed to tensions within the employment relationship.

While verbal abuses and bullying tactics were a daily phenomenon in the two organizations, especially on the front-end/checkouts, organizations saw the customer as the 'necessary evil' for food retail. Although the employees complained about the treatment from customers, there was an acknowledgement that without them, the job would be even more monotonous. Customers, in fact, could be described as something of a coping mechanism.

Employees in both organizations had developed identical multiple strategies to cope with monotony. Individuals commented that in quiet days they might *'go away and rumble, tidy stuff up, you know, your bins and get your hangers away and basically tidy up - may go and carry bags or may go and help people pack bags'* (E7.UK1). Moreover, the multi-tasking and queue-busting strategy found in both organizations helped employees to cope with repetitiveness by stepping away from the tills and providing assistance to other departments. Yet, the size of the stores and the excessive number of customers using the store, especially on weekends and busy periods, did not allow employees to utilize these coping strategies. This has led to the development of an alternative coping strategy, which was the major coping strategy in the two cases, that of chatting with customers.

The employees had reversed the monotonous customer flow through the tills and turned it into an interactive coping strategy to challenge the robotic process of scanning. Evidence showed that chatting with the customer helped workers to escape monotony and made their job process more interesting and less boring. Employees in both organizations, across the shop floor, used this coping mechanism. As an employee in the Music and Video department (UK2) commented, chatting with customers or helping customers to find a product on the shelves helped him to move away from the monotonous shelf stacking and to escape repetitiveness.

Overall, the customer had a double role on the shop floor. On one hand, the customer's demands shaped the organization of work, whilst on the other hand the customer was influential on the nature of work and employees' views on their job. The customer could either generate to the employees feelings of pressure, stress and frustration or became the device to cope the routinized job.

6.2 The Cyprus Cases: The new market and the lean environment

6.2.1 A developing market in a Price War: the cost pressures

The Cyprus grocery market has faced with dramatic changes in the past decade. In fact, before 2005 only homegrown grocers were operating on the island, whilst before the banking crisis of 2012 Cyprus was perceived as an attractive market for investments by multinational food retailers. Cy2 entered the market in 2005, followed by an international discount food retailer, generating pressures for lower costs and product prices. The investments of the international grocers in the market brought the price to the centre of

attention for both customers and grocers, and transformed the pricing policies and the competition tactics of players in the market.

The senior financial manager of Cy1 discussed the aggressive price war in the market, especially during recession. The same participant also commented that the financial cost increased dramatically since the country entered the recession. In particular, the operational cost had skyrocketed because of the recent austerity measures introduced by the I.M.F. The increases in V.A.T, fuel taxes, and taxes on property, increased the operational costs and affected the organization's profitability. Moreover, the recent cut on bank deposits influenced Cypriots' buying power and made them more careful with their shopping expenses, which in turn affected sales. Participants in both organizations acknowledged a drop in the number of customers in the stores and argued that the customers were more sceptical about how much they would spend on food.

6.2.1.1 Surviving the crisis: reduction of labour cost

The new market dynamics brought the management of cost to the centre of attention. With the Cyprus market going through a price war in an era of austerity, the need for a leaner regime and the reduction of labour cost was a 'one-way' solution. The financial line manager in Cy1 suggested that labour cost was the major cost for a supermarket and similarly the store manager in Cy2 argued that the labour cost was directly linked to sales and profits, stressing the need to keep it low to attain higher profits. This manager discussed the pressure by the Head-Office/Cy2 to keep labour costs at the minimum, commenting that every store was benchmarked with other stores to the standards set by the Head-office, while the store manager had to take measures to meet those standards. Every store was under the direct surveillance of Cyprus Head Quarters, as well as the Parent Company, suggesting that they could not escape monitoring, and the direct control on labour cost, which generated pressures for the store management team.

Nevertheless, the store managers transferred this pressure onto line managers. As the store manager/Cy2 argued, a successful line manager was the one that was organizing work in such a way to achieve high sales with the lowest possible labour cost. This showed that across the organization, on the different levels of management, there was a common belief that the store should run on the minimum labour force. Commonly in both organizations, the checkouts had always been operating with the minimum required labour, whereas both companies had the minimum required staff on the shop floor in general. Overall, both companies scheduled their labour needs based on the customer flow in the stores, targeting

the least possible labour cost, with support between departments being a common practice to reduce labour costs.

6.2.1.2 Current norms in cutting labour cost

The start of the recession in Cyprus pushed the organizations to take measures in an attempt to reduce what they spent on labour. A common measure taken by both case studies was the cut of overtime payment. None of the two organizations paid overtime for the extra working hours. However, the organizations asked employees to work overtime on busy days and offered them an early finish on non-busy days. Yet, there were slight differences in the two organizations on how this measure was applied. Specifically, in Cy2, employees were paid overtime on Sundays, whilst in Cy1 the top management decided not to pay Sunday as overtime, rather they offered it as an extra day off. Nonetheless, this measure was violating the employment law, which specified that Sundays and bank holidays had to be paid as a double-shift.

Closure of departments, redundancies, and recruitment freezes were additional cost reduction measures taken by Cy2. This was indeed the case in 2013 when the store manager in Cy2, following the orders from Head Office, proceeded to close the customer service office. Yet, with the recession deepening, the Head Quarters introduced even more harsh measures for this store. In particular, a three-phase redundancy strategy was implemented, reducing the number of employees in the store from 121 to just over 70. The checkouts, the shelves, and the frozen-food departments were particularly targeted with redundancy.

The frozen-food line manager in Cy2 discussed the problems that emerged as a result of these redundancies, with fewer employees being available to carry out the same amount of tasks. He suggested that the biggest problem was the stocking of shelves, where the quality of customer service had dropped. This, he explained, translated into the limited availability of products, as shelves were not stocked on time or as often as they were before the redundancies.

The food-section line manager argued that she was often assisting her employees in stocking, tidying up and dusting the shelves. This was more evident in days when absences occurred, especially in cases where the line manager could not cover the absence. Yet, in this department, shifts were more difficult to cover due to the limited number of staff available. Therefore, the line manager had to roll up her sleeves, give up her managerial

role, and carry out employees' tasks. Similarly, the frozen-section line manager also reported increased responsibilities:

'I am now responsible for orders, returns, stocking and cleaning...so they reduced our staff and gave us more responsibilities' (LM3.Cy2).

Similar views emerged through the interview with a checkout manager in Cy2. She stressed that the biggest issue in the store was the shortage in labour, commenting that there were fewer employees available to serve the customers in each shift and often, especially on busy days, the customers were complaining, as the queues were longer.

The store management team of Cy2 developed a multi-tasking strategy to tackle the glitches in the departments due to labour shortages. Specifically, employees from the checkouts were often asked to assist on stocking and tidying products on the shelves, whilst vice versa shop floor employees were trained to assist the front-end. The HR manager informed the shop floor employees that they would assist on the front-end in each shift by adding footnotes on the daily rotas. According to checkout employees, this contributed significantly to a faster service, which was the main target for customer service in the organization. They also stressed that this tactic was purposively followed to tackle queues, and at the same time, save costs. Yet, the intensification of the job for employees who worked in departments other than the checkouts was evident.

Both organizations used rotation with support being given to the checkouts from the non-food section, to provide a higher quality of customer service. Nevertheless, the financial line manager in Cy1 argued that this tactic would be relatively effective for the organization only in the case that the company would reduce its labour volume. Although Cy1 did not take any measures to reduce its labour force, this manager suggested that this was necessary for the organization. She proposed changes in the working schedules, stressing the necessity for a more flexible workforce. She argued that the organization should have provided less working hours to its employees, should place more emphasis on the staffing needs during the busy hours and use staff from other departments in order to cover the extra labour needs. This provided confirmatory evidence that similarly to Cy2, redundancies were also a strategy considered by Cy1 managers, although the organization did not proceed to any redundancies by the time of this research.

6.2.2 Working time: flexibility and the new opening hours

The Cyprus food retail market faced dramatic changes in its infrastructure due to increases in international competition and the price war. However, the changes in the market continued after the recession due to the employers' attempts to manage labour costs, as well as the intervention of the state and the introduction of the new regulations regarding store-opening hours.

When the country entered recession, the unemployment, especially for young graduates, increased dramatically. The Cyprus Government in an attempt to tackle increasing unemployment had provided a crucial revision in the 'Regulations of the operation of shops and the Employment Terms', instituting new provisions regarding the opening hours of the general retail sector, including food retailing. The new regulations specified an extension to the opening hours for retail shops. In particular, with the introduction of these new regulations, [food] retailers were allowed to remain open between 7am-10pm daily and 9am-9pm on Sundays, whereas before they were not allowed to operate on Sundays. Stores remained open until 8pm on weekdays, with the exception of Wednesdays where they remained open until 3pm. This regulation was firstly introduced for the tourist season (June-October). Nevertheless, the Minister's decree continued to be practiced by food retailers, while political circles further discussed extensions to opening hours, with shops opening at 5am on a daily basis.

The new opening hours created extra working time, which was to be covered by newly hired employees who were currently unemployed. The new employees would be employed on a part-time basis, whilst the government would cover 65% of their salary. Therefore, the new opening hours and the coverage of a percentage of the monthly salary for these part-time employees were incentives for retailers to hire new employees and improve the levels of youth unemployment.

Nevertheless, the two case study organizations showed limited interest to recruit new workers. For example, in Cy2, there was no evidence of any new recruits on the shop floor, whilst in Cy1 the recruitment of new employees was minimal. The top management teams of the two companies were not keen to recruit new people and utilized alternative tactics to cover the extra working hours.

A checkout line manager in Cy2 discussed the impact of the new working hours on the rotas and described rota preparation as 'messy and complex'. She argued that although the company should recruit new employees, at least for the summer period, they decided to put

pressure on the current employees. They reduced the number of employees who worked in each shift and enhanced the support between departments in order to cover the extra working hours and at the same time to avoid any extra costs for new recruits.

The majority of the employees working in Cy2 were part-timers. After 2008, due to the start of the global recession, the organization decided to reduce the amount of full-time staff and relied on part-time employment to cover its labour needs. The store manager suggested that the increase in part-time employees on the shop floor was a mechanism to reduce costs through flexibility.

‘By having part-timers [in the store], you can increase or reduce their hours based on your needs, whereas you cannot change their hours of full-time employees...the only thing you can do is to let them go. However, by reducing the hours of the part-timers you have a direct positive effect on the labour cost.’

(StoreManager.Cy2)

Data also revealed a shift on the organization’s recruitment strategy, focusing exclusively on part-time employment, while they also changed full-timers to part-time. Indeed, some of the employees on the checkouts reported that they used to work on a full-time contract; however, the organization reduced their hours over the last two years.

‘I was working full-time...but because the store was not that busy anymore they put us as part-time... in order not to lose my job, I agreed with that.’

(E7.Cy2)

Employees did stress the issue of the low pay and requested to work more hours and to become full-time workers. Data clearly illustrated the financial struggle of these employees, especially in an era of economic crisis. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that employees were happy to work extra hours on Sundays and Wednesdays. Even though employees were more pressured to cover these extra hours, they were pleased that these extra shifts were available to them in order to increase their monthly income.

Alternatively, Cy1 proceeded to new recruitment following the Minister’s decree. Yet, these employees worked only in Store2 and this was mainly related to the seasonal nature of this store. According to the previous law, this store was allowed to remain open on Wednesdays and Sundays because it was located in a tourist area. Prior to the introduction of the new regulations, the Head Store covered the extra Sunday shifts in Store2. The company used to pay that as overtime and it was up to the employees’ discretion to work

this extra time. Employees in this organization also wanted to work these extra shifts because it was extra money to their monthly salary as these shifts were paid as double-time by the organization. However, after the introduction of new regulations, this exchange of employees between the stores was limited because the Head Store was now also operating on Sundays and the line managers in this store were reluctant to send any employees to Store2. Sending employees to other stores was not a viable option as they also they had to cover their own department's shifts.

Currently, because all the stores of the company remained open on Sundays, the organization had to change the way in which Sunday shifts were covered in Store2 and to find new ways to cover other shifts. One strategy was the recruitment of new employees, as the government decree suggested. Nevertheless, these new recruits were not enough to cover the new shifts and since the Head-Store had stopped providing employees to cover in Store2, a clash of interests emerged between employees in Store2 and the management team. A line manager in Store2 stated that it became mandatory for the employees of the Store2 to work on Sundays.

Nonetheless, data revealed a hesitation by front-line employees in Cy1 to work on Sundays. Unlike Cy2, where employees wanted the extra overtime and the extra money of the Sunday shift, in Cy1, because the organization, illegally, did not pay this shift as overtime, employees were reluctant to work overtime. To explain more, the organization violated the employment law, which specified that the Sunday shift was paid as overtime/double shift. One young checkout operator (HeadStore.Cy1) commented that a year ago there was an antagonism between employees to work on Sundays in Store2. However, after the cut of the Sunday overtime benefit by the top management, the employees did not want to work the Sunday shifts.

‘Sunday is [now] only €30. It’s a usual day’s payment and no one wants to work it anymore. We are forced now to attend on Sundays, because the Store manager got angry and she said that it’s mandatory for all employees to work on Sundays. End of the story.’ (E9.Cy1)

As the quote suggests, it was no longer at the employees’ discretion whether they wanted to work the extra hours as line managers were now forcing employees to cover the extra hours. A checkout operator in store2 commented: *‘now that ‘P’[head store] remains open it is compulsory for everyone to work on Sundays’* (E6.Cy1). This showed that the organization pressured employees to extend their working hours and cover the extra shifts

created through the new opening hours. Hence, the Sunday now became a mandatory working day. This generated feelings of anger and unfairness. Employees discussed the impact on their personal life because of the uncertainty on their working hours and the aggravation of the working time. A checkout operator in Store2 discussed that the new opening hours was the reason she had to work every day, including Sundays. One younger employee in the same store stressed:

‘They force us to work on Sundays. It is supposed to be every other week but I’ve been working for three Sundays in a row now, I’ve been working every day for the last three weeks without a day off’ (E9.Cy1).

This was a common complaint in both organizations with employees flagging the constant and everyday work. The data provided confirmatory evidence of the intensification of the working hours for shop floor employees. The new opening hour regulations and the attempt of the two organizations to keep labour costs low and at the same time to cover the extra shifts, generated pressures on employees. Line managers, especially in Cy1, were bullying their subordinates to cover these shifts and pushed them to work extra on top of their contracted hours, whilst the latter were scared to refuse these extra hours due to feelings of job insecurity. This was evident in both cases and although it was less appealing in Cy2, it was not entirely absent.

6.2.3 A low status and monotonous job

6.2.3.1 Food retailing: a job just for immigrants?

The majority of employees in the stores examined were female immigrants, with most of them being Pontic-Greeks or immigrants from the Eastern Europe-Balkans. These employees have been working with the organizations since the first years of their opening in the market. This was especially reflected in Cy1, where since the late 90s, the total labour needs of the organization were covered by immigrants. Over the 60% of the employees that participated in this research -across the two cases - immigrated to Cyprus before 2005. This triggered the researcher’s curiosity as to why Cypriots chose not to work in food retailing. The data revealed two contradictory views. Firstly, a view from Cypriot society emerged, perceiving food retail as a lower class job, whilst conversely a new trend emerged showing that more and more Cypriots were seeking jobs within this sector because of the current recession and the increasing rates of unemployment.

Young Cypriot part-time employees, in both organizations, discussed the lack of available jobs related to their tertiary education. A recent employed checkout operator in Cy2, when asked why she selected this job, stated: *'because I couldn't find anything different'*. Participants argued that they were unemployed after graduating university for a period up to six months and that food retail was their last option as a job choice. This clearly explained the changing trend in the market with more Cypriots seeking jobs within food retail. In both organizations, managers discussed the excessive number of job applications they received every week, with the majority of applicants being Cypriots. In particular, the store manager in Cy2 stated that more Cypriots were currently seeking a job in the supermarket, which was unlikely before the recession. He also commented that there were no positions available.

Data revealed that Cypriots chose not to work in food retail because of the low wages. A Pontic-Greek checkout operator in Cy1, who worked in the organization since it opened its first store stated: *'They [Cypriots] preferred to stay at home rather to work for that money'*. More data verified this behaviour. Particularly, the Store manager/Cy1 argued that in the early 2000s the organization had a great need for labour. However, it was very difficult to find any available Cypriots to work for the organization because the wages were very low and they preferred to turn to other sectors, especially hospitality.

Additionally, the financial manager in Cy1 commented: *'[before the recession Cypriots] preferred to work in clothes shops rather to work on checkouts, I don't get the difference'*. Participants provided an explanation of this phenomenon. It was suggested that this was driven by the perception of food retail jobs within society. Unanimously, participants, in both cases, both Cypriots and immigrants, suggested that the Cypriot perceived the job in food retailing in a disparaging manner. Working in a supermarket was perceived as a demeaning job in terms of the individual's social status. In particular, a Pontic-Greek employee in Cy1 stated that people believed that the checkout *'was not a job that deserved to a Cypriot'*. Thus, the argument emerged that working in a supermarket was a job for the lower class. Respondents explained this social perception as a result of the high educational status of Cypriot society and the small community of the country – a tight-knit community where everyone knows one another. A checkout operator in Cy1, stated: *'this is a job that Cypriots don't do. Most of us study and they see it as pejorative... as one of my colleagues said "I'm not studying to become a slave"'* (E1.Cy2), whereas the store manager in Cy2 commented that because these shops operated in small communities this

affected the individual's social status. He suggested that people were feeling embarrassed to serve their neighbour on their shopping.

Overall, the worsening working conditions in the hotel industry, the rising unemployment, the recession and the impact on the retail sector with SMEs clothing trade companies facing bankruptcy, pushed Cypriots to seek income in the supermarkets. *'Now that things are tighter they [Cypriots] beg for a job here'*, argued a Pontic-Greek in Cy1. Yet the increasing unemployment in the country and Cypriots seeking jobs in food retail had generated a new shape of xenophobia. Participants in both organizations argued that often the customers were complaining about the organizations employing non-Cypriots when the list of unemployed Cypriots was getting longer. For example, in Cy1 some customers refused to be served by non-Cypriots and moved to a different till. Nevertheless, participants in both cases, both Cypriots and immigrants, did not espouse customer's views and strongly criticized them. The employees and managers in these two organizations acknowledged that immigrant employees were those who supported the organizations and offered them their labour for a small price, whereas Cypriots were just 'too proud' to accept this job. *'When the company needed us we were not here for them'*, said one Cypriot employee in Cy2.

6.2.3.2 The tedious job process

Having recognized the dynamics and the changes within the Cyprus market, the new opening hours, and the perception of the society on the food retail job, it is necessary to also examine the daily reality on the shop floor and the job process. This section discusses the food retail job process with focus on the checkouts as the majority of the participants worked in the department, either as their main job or as supportive labour.

Interviews revealed an identical work process and a similar organization of work in the two organizations. The interaction with the customer was a vital aspect of the job with focus on customer service and emotional labour. In fact, smiling was part of the job and the customer service policy of the two organizations. Data, in both cases, revealed a pressure on employees by their line managers to smile, who often reprimanded employee for not smiling. The store manager in Cy1 argued that employees on the front-end had to constantly smile because they were the 'image' of the organization towards the customer. Unlike the checkout operators, employees on the shelves did not interact with the customer to the same degree and because they had a greater freedom to move around the store, they were able to avoid customers and so escape the pressure of smiling. In contrast, the limited

mobility of checkout operators on the front-end, and the direct surveillance by the line manager, put employees in a pressuring situation of 'wearing a smile' to serve the customer.

Additionally, participants in both organizations reported the emphasis on speed for customer service. Speed, and consequently shorter queues, was the core measure for high quality in customer service. Even though the emotional part of the job, which demanded the employee to greet and smile at the customer, was a vital aspect of the serving culture in the two organizations, in busy periods speed was the main target. In both cases, speed was a demand from both the customer and the top management. A checkout operator in Cy2 stated, *'You need to be fast, you shouldn't have queues on your till. The managers tell me to be faster'* (E10.Cy2). The store manager in Cy1/store2 discussed the great need for speed in customer service, arguing that when it was very busy she would go to the next employee and whisper in their ear to be faster. Similarly, the checkout managers were responsible to signal to the employees to be faster when queues were becoming longer. This clearly showed the emphasis for both organizations on fast service.

Nevertheless, more data illustrated a shift in the customer service culture over the last years for the two organizations. Although speed was, still, the core element in the customer service culture, the companies also invested in customer satisfaction. As a checkout operator in Cy1 commented, currently the company placed more emphasis on providing quality in customer service. The emphasis on quality in customer service was translated into more tasks for employees, where packing the customers' shopping became part of the service process. Data illustrated a list of extra responsibilities for employees on the front-end, which undeniably were now part of the checkout job process. For example, checkout employees were responsible for cleaning and tidying up their tills throughout their shift, to bring bags and till-roll papers from the warehouse and distribute them to the tills, whilst during the day they were responsible for picking up the baskets. Employees in both cases were asked to provide even more support while serving the customer. For instance, they had to be available to make returns of damaged or unwanted products, bring a product from the shelves for the customer, and scale fresh groceries, such as fruits and vegetables. Clearly, the new focus on customer service intensified the checkout job.

Although a line manager in Cy2 argued that the extra actions were vital for the quality in customer service, a closer look at the data showed that employees perceived their job as stressful and intense due to the extra responsibilities. *'There are so many things you are*

asked to do, you run up and down all the time, it is so stressful' argued a checkout employee in Cy2. Data revealed tensions in the employment relationship, with employees perceiving the extra tasks allotted to them as an expression of antipathy by the line manager.

6.2.3.3 Breaking monotony and coping with boredom

The data in both cases also revealed the checkout job as monotonous. Respondents in the two organizations, both managers and employees, stressed the repetitiveness of the checkout job and suggested that monotony was inherent in the job. Employees, in both cases, argued that they carried out the same tasks every day, while a line manager argued that the repetitiveness of the job was gruelling.

‘It’s the same thing every day...I was doing that job [checkouts] for seven years, I didn’t like it, sometimes I was thinking “God all those years the same thing, I just wanna go home”’(LM1.Cy1).

Evidence showed that participants in both organizations perceived the job, both on the checkouts and in other departments, as routinized and boring. Nevertheless, a significant number of participants recognized that this was just the nature of the job. Yet, differences were identified between the checkouts and other departments as in both cases employees that worked in the food and non-food departments had the freedom of mobility and more authority to manage their own time. These employees, as the store manager-Cy1 argued, could walk around the shop floor, whilst checkout employees could not leave their post without the permission of the line manager.

Unanimously, participants on the front-end, in both organizations, reported boredom on the quieter days of the week (Tuesday and Wednesday). Yet, the rotation strategies adopted in the two organizations, as well as the extra tasks attached to the checkout job, acted as coping mechanisms for the boredom. The store manager in Cy1 suggested that the extra tasks helped employees to ‘escape monotony’. In Cy1, employees intentionally asked their line manager’s permission to leave the till, either to assist on the shelves or the clothing section, or even to pick up the baskets. As a checkout operator stated:

‘When it’s quiet you are getting bored, I ask my manager to stand up and do something else for the time to pass and you not to be bored’ (E18.Cy1).

Nevertheless, as a checkout employee in the same organization stated, it was not possible to leave her post on busy days and the managers would not approve of anyone leaving their checkout when the shop was full.

It should not be a surprise, however, that all employees within both organizations preferred to be working on busier days. Despite the discussion of the monotonous job, especially on the checkouts, employees suggested that they preferred the shop floor to be busy as time passed by more quickly, meaning boredom was no longer an issue. Surprisingly, the busy shop floor was positively affecting employees' well-being in the workplace. Without any exceptions, the checkout operators in both cases suggested that it was more exhausting not to have customers in store because of the boredom of just sitting on the till and waiting. Yet, this seems to contradict the findings described in a later chapter where employees would deliberately leave their till to avoid the busy front-end. Moreover, data showed that most employees, in all the stores, desired to sit on the tills that were usually preferred by the customers in order to keep themselves busy.

6.2.3.4 Customers: chatting and bullying

It was clear that employees wanted the shop floor to be busy in order to escape the boredom and the monotony of a quiet day. Almost all the participants when asked what they liked about their job responded that the interaction/chatting with the customer was the most enjoyable aspect of the job. However, when asked *what is it that you don't like in this job?*, most of the interviewees, even those that discussed the interaction with the customer as the most enjoyable aspect of the job, stressed that the demanding and arrogant customers was the least enjoyable feature of the job. Therefore, data showed a contradiction in employees' views. On one hand, chatting with the customer was perceived as a mechanism to cope with monotony and made the job process less boring. A checkout operator in Cy2 stated:

‘The job might be monotonous but because we meet pleasant people every day and we chat to them, monotony is gone. So the customer helps you to have a more pleasant time on the till’ (E1.Cy2).

This view emerged through the majority of the interviews with both managers and employees in the two organizations. For instance, employees in the Head Store-Cy1 argued that because they had regular customers in the store, the few minutes spent chatting

to these particular individuals altered the boring and/or the monotonous day on the checkouts.

On the contrary, the customer was also a source of tension on the shop floor. Participants across the shop floor in both organizations discussed the demanding customers and the common and frequent verbal abuse by the customer. For instance, the store manager/Cy2 argued that working on the front-end/checkouts was the most tough job in the store because these workers received the complaints of every '*cranky and uncultivated individual/customer*', whilst he argued that this job required endless and unwavering patience and *rhino-thick skin* to deal with the customer. Indeed, employees in both cases supported this view, suggesting that they had to remain calm and unflappable towards any verbal harassment from the customer.

The store manager in Cy1 argued that often customer's rude behaviour resulted in psychological abuse, describing cases of employees crying on the till, while the line managers often had to intervene. The abuse from the customer was a common daily incident in both cases. Yet, participants suggested that this was more intense after the banking crisis in Cyprus, as customers became more demanding and more sensitive in terms of pricing and service quality. However, employees in both cases would not react to customer abuse. In fact, a universal view among participants was that the customer '*is always right*'. Front-line employees, in both cases, suggested that no matter how demanding, abusive, or cranky the customer was, they could not confront them and would not get involved in an argument with the customers, because the argument would always favour the customer. The focus on customer service and the intolerance by the top management teams on customer complaints, put employees in a passive position towards harassment by the customer. Employees in both cases suggested that the recession made it more likely that someone would lose their job because of bad customer service.

'My job depends on the customer, especially in this period. Now things are stricter, they'll prefer to lose you rather to lose the customer. You are just replaceable.' (E3.Cy1)

A wider fear was obvious in all the stores examined, regarding the power of the customer over the employee's employment status. To be more specific, employees were afraid that if the customer put forward a complaint to the manager, that would have an impact on them and they would be at risk of losing their job. An employee in Cy2 said, '*you always have to serve the customer perfectly, my name will be printed on their receipt, they might*

complaint, and I'll lose my job.' (E1.Cy2) This was a common view in the two organizations.

To sum up, in both cases, conflicting views were presented through the data regarding the role of the customer. On one hand, the customer was a mechanism to cope with monotony and boredom, whilst on the other hand the customer was a source of tension and fear. The managers' intolerance of low quality customer service, and the pressure on employees by both managers and customers, was generating tensions within the employment relationship with employees expressing feelings of insecurity and stress.

6.2.3.5 Direct surveillance by the line manager

So far, this section had described the tedious job process and acknowledged the dynamics that affect the employment relationship on the shop floor. However, far too little attention was given to the role of the line manager, which had a significant impact on the employment relationship.

In both organizations, there was always one line manager present on the front-end/checkouts, whilst on the rest of the shop floor the line managers were present only on the dayshift. Indeed, as the frozen-section line manager in Cy2 commented, he was not present on the shop floor all the time as he had to meet with the suppliers in the warehouse, or to attend meetings with the store manager. Conversely, in both organizations, the checkout line managers would rarely leave the front-end. Cy1 had set up the front-end layout of its stores in such a way that the manager was able to observe all employees. In fact, the line managers were usually standing on an overhead desk, which was located in the middle of the front-end area, and they were observing the front-end area. Standing on the desk the manager had a visual contact with all the front-line employees and was able to monitor every action and the general operation of the checkouts. Likewise, the line managers in Cy2 were also directly monitoring the front-end. Although, in this store the managers did not have the 'foreman's desk', data showed that the front-end layout again was structured in such a way to enable the manager to observe the checkouts. Particularly, in this store, and in every store of this organization, the kiosk was located in front of the checkouts and the managers were running the kiosk, whilst at the same time carried out their front-end tasks. Therefore, by sitting on the kiosk they also had a visual observation of the front-line.

In both organizations, data revealed the tight direct control by checkout line managers. For example, some employees were forbidden to leave their post without the permission of the line manager, even to use the toilet. *'No one will ever leave their till without the permission of the manager'*, commented an employee in Cy1. Yet, data from both cases showed that this varied, as the majority of line managers would give the employees the freedom to leave their till in order to serve a customer as set by the customer service standards of the organizations.

Checkout line managers held multiple and more complex responsibilities than the rest of the line managers in the stores. Firstly, these managers were responsible for the safe box, to provide change to the cashiers, to make returns and correct scanning/sales mistakes. The checkout managers in both cases commented that they could not leave the front-end because these mistakes were very common and without their electronic key and their presence, the employee could not serve the customer. Therefore, it is understandable that the manager's presence was crucial for the customer service. Similarly, to their subordinates they had a daily and constant interaction with the customers and received customer complaints.

In both cases, line managers' core responsibility was the management of the front-line employees, to ensure the high quality on customer service. The line managers, both in Cy1 and Cy2, allocated employees on the front-end, assigning them to a designated till in every shift to ensure a better shopping experience for the customers on the front-end. The managers in both Cy1 and Cy2 also monitored employees' behaviour to make sure that the customer service standards were followed. The direct surveillance from the line manager though included the management of working time. This specified that managers were responsible to manage employees' tea breaks and monitor the break duration. In addition, they also monitored the attendance at work in terms of lateness and absence incidences. More discussion on these issues will follow in the next chapter.

What it is important to point out here is that managers, in both cases, have discussed their excessive workload devolved to their role and the impact on their working experience. For example, a checkout manager in Cy1 argued that in busy days, such as Fridays and Saturdays, she had no time to deal with employees because of the excessive number of customers in the store. Managers on the front-end, in both organizations, argued that in busy days they could not have a break as they had to be present on the front-end.

More data illustrated the intensification of the front-line managers' role in the two companies, which led to tensions within the employment relationship. Specifically, in Cy2, after the redundancies, the line managers were responsible for running the kiosk, while at the same time they had to monitor the front-end and carry out their supervisory responsibilities. They argued that in rush hours they felt stressed and unable to complete both tasks.

Even though some data showed that checkout employees were sympathetic to the increased workload of their managers, more data illustrated the impact on them. In particular, employees discussed the impact on customer service and respectively the pressure from the customer because the managers were not available to help them deal with difficult and abusive customers or even authorize a cancelation of mistaken scans. Employees in Cy2 discussed the longer queues and the delay on the customer service and their feelings of stress, arguing that often the managers were busy on the kiosk and could not offer their assistance to the checkout operators straight away.

A similar situation was found in Cy1 with employees suggesting that there was always tension on the front-end between the managers and the employees. This tension on the front-end had multiple sources. In fact, the direct surveillance by the line managers and the pressure by the latter on employees to follow the customer service standards bred a clash of interests between the two groups. Additionally, the increasing workload of managers shifted their focus on the commercial part of their job, putting employees and their needs at a lower priority. Over the last few years, the organization had devolved many responsibilities to the checkout managers, such as the preparation of the restaurant orders, which was extremely time-consuming. Therefore, the intensification of the managers' role was also evidenced in this organization: '*We have so many responsibilities...some days the pressure is so high*' stated a line manager in Cy1.

This showed that managers were too busy to carry out their tasks properly, with the management of people low on their list of priorities, especially on busy days. The managers were asked whether some tasks should be taken away from them. The answer unsurprisingly was that in the era of austerity and with the fear of redundancies, they could not refuse to carry out any tasks. Hence, line managers, in both cases, were trapped in a situation where they would sacrifice their HR role for the sake of the excessive workload, neglecting the impact on the employee.

6.3 Chapter conclusion

This chapter provided an analysis of the political, economic, and social dynamics within the food retail markets in the UK and Cyprus. Evidence showed that in both countries, organizations were involved in competitive markets within which the pressures for lower costs were endemic. Research evidence clearly showed that all the organizations tried to keep their costs low with a focus on reducing the labour cost. All four case study organizations have developed an identical organization of work, which was based on flexible working schemes with part-time working becoming core to the labour structure. The employers manipulated working time through the introduction of controls, attempting to keep labour cost at the lowest possible level. The up-to-date technology, the provision of less working hours to employees, the intensification of the job and the direct surveillance by the line manager were the main levers utilized by employers in both countries to keep the labour costs low. Finally, examining the nature of the food retail job in these two countries and the social dynamics on the shop floor revealed similar results. Participants discussed the monotony of the job and the consequent feelings of boredom on the shop floor, which was subjected though to coping tactics. Respondents also acknowledged the role of the customers and their power over the employment relationship and the labour process. This analysis provided confirmatory evidence the tensions between the employees and the management on the supermarket shop were not absent but part of an antagonistic employment relationship. It is within this context that the analysis next explores the management of absence and workplace attendance, and examines how these are part of the contested and antagonistic employment relationship in these two markets.

7. Attendance at work, absence management and the line managers' role

The data above evidenced the contested nature of the employment relationship in food retailing. A fundamental question of this thesis is to explore the manifestation of attendance within the labour process. Additionally to the latter objective, this chapter explores the management of absence and provides an extensive discussion regarding the role of line managers in the management of absence and workplace attendance within the four case studies. It explores the line managers' involvement in the absence management process, examines their level of autonomy and discretion, and provides an overview regarding the day-to-day practice of managing attendance on the line. The chapter discusses the absence behaviour in the UK and Cyprus and indicates the drop in absence in both countries, suggesting that this is a result of the current recession, the double approach in managing attendance, and the role of line managers in the latter processes. Finally, this chapter raises the discussion of employees' consent to their subordination in attending at work, which is to be discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

7.1 The UK Experience

7.1.1 Reasons for absence

The participants in the two UK organizations were asked whether they believed absence was always genuine. Unsurprisingly, participants, in both case studies, without any exceptions, commented that absence from work was not always genuine. They argued that non-genuine absence is 'human nature' and that within these large stores it was to be expected that a percentage of absence would not be genuine.

A line manager in UK2 suggested that sickness was used as an excuse by employees to take time off work, whilst in both organizations general illness and, according to managers, stress were reported as the most common reasons for absence. The managers referred to both short and long-term absence as the result of stress. An HR manager in UK2 commented that the sore back used to be the most common excuse for absence, but this had changed as currently absence was more related to stress and anxiety. As he stated, *'stress is the new bad back'*. Indeed, employees, in both organizations, were using general illness and stress as an excuse to be absent from work. An employee (UK2) admitted: *'I don't know how many times I phoned in sick. I could have probably worked some of them'*. Therefore, it is understandable that stress emerged as the new phenomenon in these two cases, whilst as the managers suggested, an increasing number of employees uses stress as a reason for absence. The fact that symptoms of stress were not visible to non-medical

trained individuals/managers, encouraged maybe employees to utilize this as an excuse to take time off work.

Additionally, the available data suggested that the work organization and the pressures on the shop floor were common reasons for absence. The regional HR manager in UK1 discussed absence as the first sign of discontent, arguing that people who were unhappy with their job and their working hours were often absent. Correspondingly, employees in both cases argued that the boring and repetitive nature of the job, the limited variety of tasks, the ‘crumby customers’, and the long shifts were reasons not to attend work. A checkout operator said: *‘If folks don’t like their job then they might just go: “well I’ll go sick”’* (E11.UK2), whereas others commented that people were often ‘fed-up’ with the job. The latter was particularly the case on the checkouts as the checkout operators in both cases called in sick most often. A checkout line manager in UK1, who had progressed from the checkouts, argued that the nature of work on checkouts was a reason for people not to attend work:

‘To be fair, when I was sitting on the checkout I hated it...I think it could be possibly a reason for not coming in’ (LM1.UK1).

Employees also utilized absence to express their dissatisfaction with changes in their terms and conditions, with absence levels increasing when individuals were underperforming. The latter was related to the targets set, as employees struggled to meet those and they were pressured by their managers. A line manager in UK1 discussed the relationship with the managers as a major driver for employees’ decision not to attend work. Nevertheless, he recognized that this decision making process was complex and a variety of factors affected non-attendance decisions.

Overall, evidence seemed to suggest that employees were using short-term sickness absence, and particularly stress, as an excuse to be off from work, whereas the dynamics that emerged though the organization of work were the main reasons for individuals’ decision not to attend work. Nevertheless, a closer look at the data reveals a different story, identifying the significant drop in absence rates in both organizations. Next, this chapter will explain the reasons that led to this drop in absence.

7.1.2 Drop in absence: a complex explanation

In both organizations, the Head Quarters had set targets for absence levels, standing at 3%. Yet, in both cases, managers discussed the significant drop in absence levels. In UK1, the

HR manager discussed the change in absence levels over the last eighteen months. The store prior to 2011 was on a 'red light', whilst absence targets today had turned 'green', standing below the 3%. This drop in absence was a common theme discussed by managers across all stores. For example, in Store2-UK2, which is a gigantic store with more than 500 employees, and which is located in an area where absence is historically higher, absence fluctuated between 2.1% and 2.4%. This was significantly lower than the organizational target, whereas in 2010 absence was double than today's figures.

The question stressed at this point is why were absence figures in decline? The answer was not a simple one as a blend of reasons caused this drop. These ranged from the simplistic view that the current economic climate was the main reason for absence drop, to the sophisticated control strategies introduced by the organizations, such as the centralized absence policy, the new flexible view on absence management, and the role of line managers.

7.1.2.1 The recession and the drop in (short-term) absence: a simplistic account

Participants in both cases associated the drop in absence, and particularly short-term absence, to the era of austerity and the recent unstable economic climate. A senior manager in UK1 suggested that short-term absence dropped when the recession started because many people could not afford to take time off work. Similarly, an HR manager in UK2 described the recession as the main motive for individuals to put a greater effort to attend work because they needed the money.

Managers recognized that employees struggled financially and absence was perceived as a financial cost. Employees' responses in both organizations echoed this view. They expressed their intentions to avoid being absent, arguing that they could not afford to take time off. One employee/UK1 argued:

'I had times when I felt really sick but I still come in here because I can't afford to be sick'. (E8.UK1)

Evidently, employees discussed feelings of pressure to attend work even when sick due to the perception of absence as a financial cost. Participants, across the two companies, acknowledged instances of individuals attending work when sick [presenteeism²] because they could not afford to be absent. An HR manager (UK2) stated: *'I think they come in*

² attending work when ill' (Johns, 2011; 483)

because they don't wanna lose the money', whereas similarly one employee in UK2 commented that it was very common for individuals to attend work with a cold.

Although participants affiliated the drop in absence and presenteeism with the financial costs accompanying short-term absence, there were several explanations for this behaviour. In fact, more data revealed pressures for, and compliance to attendance due to the feelings of fear and insecurity, which emerged from the formal absence policy as is described below.

7.1.2.2 Absence management and the role of line managers

The research showed that employees in both case studies related absence with disciplinary actions. A significant number of respondents expressed their fear of been disciplined and potentially been dismissed due to personal absence. This was mainly emerging through the formal absence policy of the organizations. Yet before explaining how the formal absence policy was a source of insecurity and compliance to regular attendance, it is necessary to first briefly describe the absence policy of the two companies. This chapter will only describe the short-term absence policy, which is the main focus of this research.

In both organizations, the Head Office developed the absence policy and then communicated it across the organization. The regional HR manager of UK1 discussed the need for consistency across the company, which explained the centralized absence policy, arguing that the central function teams developed the policies and procedures and then through the various networks of regional managers cascaded them to the individual stores. Therefore, there was one central policy for the whole company and *'every store would focus on exactly the same thing'* (Regional.HRM.UK1). Likewise, a line manager in UK2 also discussed the need for consistency across the company, suggesting that in every store absence should be managed in the same way:

‘All the stores have to be the same. If everything is painted white, everything is painted white...Our absence policy is companywide; it's the same in every single store’. (LM1.UK2)

Hence, it is understandable that both organizations sought for consistency in the way absence was managed on the store sites, with a central policy being predominately determined by the Head Office, while managers at the store level implemented the policy that had already been agreed.

Line managers were key players within the formal absence policy in both organizations and one of the main HR responsibilities was the management of short-term absence. All the HR managers interviewed in this research, across the two organizations, pinpointed the importance of line managers' involvement in the absence policy. Participants in UK2 argued that it was important for line managers to know and understand why people were absent in order to support them, whilst others suggested that line managers' involvement in the policy allowed them to understand the dynamics in their teams, as well as to identify the issues that underlie individual absence. Furthermore, the attendance guide of UK1 reported that the involvement of line managers in the absence policy was advantageous to understand and improve the root causes of attendance in the store.

On the other hand, line managers in both cases argued that the management of absence was their responsibility because it affected them, as it impacted on the department's targets, budgets and sales. They commented that because absence affected their department's performance it consequently exposed them as incompetent to the rest of the management team. Indeed, an HR Manager in UK2 argued that he would hold line managers accountable if absence was increased in their particular area. Understandably, a high departmental absence rate was a negative reflection on managers' abilities and their personal performance. Therefore, they were feeling pressured to comply with the formal policy.

In both cases, line managers were the first point of contact for employees to request time off and the organizational actors who drove the implementation of the policy. This incorporated numerous and identical responsibilities for line managers within the formal policy, such as contacting absent employees at home, covering shifts, editing the 'rotas' and conducting any formal meetings specified by the formal policy as discussed below.

Strikingly, both organizations implemented an identical absence policy. Although a different terminology was used to describe the stages of the procedure, the basis of the policy was identical. Specifically, absence policy for both cases was divided into three main stages. Both organizations used the traffic light system- green, amber, red- to define the stages, flagging in this way the importance of absence as the employee progressed through the policy, describing the final stage [red] as the most crucial as it led to disciplinary hearings and the issue of warnings.

Both organizations required employees to phone in at least two hours in advance before their shift started, to inform the store on their absence. In both cases, this call went through

the 'duty manager' who was usually a line manager on duty and who was responsible for taking the call and informing the department managers for any absences. The difference between the two cases at this point was the process followed for the duty manager to receive the call. In UK1, the duty manager carried 'the sick-phone' to receive absence calls directly, whilst, in UK2, the employee called the reception and the reception put them through to the duty manager.

The sickness call was a similar standard procedure within both organizations. The designated manager followed a script of questions to collect basic information regarding the absence incident. The manager asked questions related to the personal details of the individual, their department, and the expected period of absence. Participants discussed the short duration of the phone call and its scope, which aimed just to collect basic information. One employee in UK1 discussed an attitude shift towards absence management. He said that it had always been common sense that the employee should give notice for their absence, and there was always a process of phoning in advance to the duty manager. Nevertheless, when this was first introduced as a formal policy, managers became somewhat aggressive towards absence occurrences. He commented:

'It was a third degree...it was a ten minute phone call and they made you feel really bad to phone in sick' (E14.UK1).

However, now it has been more relaxed, with managers asking standard questions just to collect the necessary information as the policy specified.

On the other hand, in UK2 it was found that the managers were still adopting a more aggressive attitude. Employees described the process of phoning absent as '*daunting and uncomfortable*' and commented that managers made them feel that they were inconveniencing them, making them feel guilty for calling in absent. An employee commented:

'I think sometimes people feel phoning in sick, but...they make you feel like you are inconveniencing them. My manager said, "Oh, I've got no-one else"...I suppose it kind of makes you feel guilty' (E3.UK2).

Employees faced further pressure after their return to work. In both companies when the employee returned at work, they had to phone in the day before to confirm their attendance. An HR manager in UK2 suggested that it was important for the company to

confirm the employees' return, as they could not afford to have two individuals 'rotaed'[sic] to do the same job.

According to the formal policy in the two organizations, the employees on their first day back at work participated in a one-to-one meeting with a line manager or a team/section leader. The only difference between the two organizations at this stage was the terminology used. In UK1 participants referred to it as 'the welcome back meeting', whilst the UK2 policy called it 'the return at work meeting'. In both cases, this was the 'green stage', which involved a short meeting - up to five minutes - between the line manager or the team/section leader and the absentee. The meeting was a bureaucratic procedure within which the interviewer followed a scripted questionnaire regarding the employee's absence. The latter filled in a meeting form, which was signed by both participants and was kept in the employee's personal file. The discussion was essentially around the period, the length and the reasons of absence, as well as actions that could be taken by the organization to accommodate any personal circumstances in order avoid future absences. Managers in both cases discussed the necessity to conduct the 'green' meeting as soon as the employee was back at work, to avoid any similar injuries and absences in the future for similar reasons, especially when the absence was related to illness. Indeed, line managers had to ensure that the employee was fit to return at work, or whether any other actions should be considered.

This first stage of the formal policy was a mechanism to avoid future absences to happen for the same reasons. The organizations tried to be proactive to the reasons of absence by providing alternatives to the individuals. A common practice applied in both cases was to provide lighter duties, less working hours, different shifts or even a different job to '*get people back to work as soon as possible*' as a line manager in UK1 argued. These practices were tactics to manage absence targets in stores as individuals returned at work under different working circumstances and therefore their personal and the store's absence percentage dropped.

This also provided the insight to employees that the organization supported the workforce. A team leader in UK1 argued that the approach towards absence was different to date, as managers were concerned on the circumstances and the reasons for absence, whilst before absence was just perceived as the failure of an employee to fulfil their contracted hours. Nevertheless, the absence policy was still a controversial system, as the union representative suggested. Although currently both organizations were supportive of the

individuals' circumstances, there was always an element of punishment. In fact, even though the employee welfare was core to the green stage, part of this meeting was the review of the employee's absence history. The managers were obliged to discuss and inform the employee of the number of days they had been off, the number of absence occasions and the impact on their personal absence percentage. Both organizations calculated absence based on the length of absence over the contracted hours. This was reviewed for each employee every 26 weeks.

Analysis showed that when an individual's absence rate was 3% or above over the last 26 weeks, it triggered the next stage of the absence policy, the 'amber stage'. This was another common element between the two organizations. This stage suggested an investigation for absence. Two managers conducted this meeting; supervisors were not allowed to be involved in this stage. Participants stated that this meeting lasted between 20-30 minutes and was looking at the bigger picture of absence.

Some differences were identified between the two cases regarding this stage. Specifically, UK1 called this stage as the 'Attendance Review Meeting', which involved an investigation of the employee's absence and it was part of a disciplinary process. The outcome of this meeting could be no actions or further steps and usually moved the process to the third stage [red], which was a disciplinary hearing where warnings could possibly be issued. The procedure progressed to the third stage with a third absence occasion within the 26 weeks period. On the other hand, managers in UK2 referred to the amber stage as informal counselling arguing that this stage was not a disciplinary but, similar to the green stage, it aimed to identify any issues underlying absence. Nonetheless, a four-week ban for overtime was issued for employees who got to this stage. Finally, when the employee was off for a third time within the 26-week period, they would progress to the red stage meeting. Participants in UK2 used the term 'investigation' to describe this last stage. The investigation would be conducted on the same day by two managers, with a high chance of going forward to disciplinary where the employee would potentially receive a warning.

A strict absence procedure was evident in both organizations. Data showed that following the route of the formal absence procedure, which was strict with timescales, absence percentages, and occasions of absence, could lead to disciplinary meetings and potential dismissals. Even though HR managers in both cases argued that not all investigations led to disciplinary and that it was down to the two line managers who participated in the

amber stage to make that decision, research revealed a different insight by employees. Respondents from both cases perceived the policy meetings as disciplinary action with the final stage being a source of fear:

‘You obviously got an absence record; you can only go off so many times before your red flag is up’ (E2.UK1).

Individuals who had been absent before and particularly those who stood on the amber stage, were those who experienced more fear of getting disciplined and displayed greater concern for their working status and therefore were more keen to attend work while sick. Managers from the two organizations similarly argued that the absence history of the individual influenced their decision to attend work and was a driver to employees compliance to regular attendance. One HR Manager in UK2 suggested that people who have been off before and were aware of the policy stages were those who were more worried about being absent. Interviews with employees in both organizations verified this view. For example, one employee in UK2 argued:

‘I didn't want to come in...but I had to...I wanted to go off sick again but...I just kept working. I don't want any more sickness against my record because they are bad with it, you know, verbal warnings’ (E3.UK2).

Correspondingly, an employee in UK1, who had already received a verbal warning for absence stated:

‘So that's me, I'm sacked because I've been off...that's the way it works, that's the way it's going to happen. Honestly, it is not worth [it] to lose my job over it.’ (E10.UK1)

Evidence from UK2 also showed that often employees attended work sick, as they wanted their line manager to verify that they were not well. This showed that there was a general perception that absence unavoidably led to disciplinary actions and potential dismissal, hence employees felt pressured to attend work, even when sick, to avoid losing their jobs.

Managers acknowledged employees’ view and stated that the investigation and disciplinary meetings were an uncomfortable and an unnatural state for employees, because they were being questioned as to why they had been off. ‘*I guess [it] is not an enjoyable situation*’ stated the HR Manager in UK1, whilst the colleague representative in UK2, who was usually present to these meetings, commented that people often got panicked and scared of moving to the next stage. This was common among employees in

both organizations. For example, one employee in UK1 who participated in the amber stage said: *'It felt like a disciplinary, it made me feel like I was being prosecuted for been ill'*. This demonstrates that employees perceived the formal absence policy as a disciplinary procedure and explains the drop in absence in both organizations, which is also evidenced by the increase in presenteeism.

Additionally, there was the wider perception among the workforce that good attendance provides job security:

'I think everybody needs a job...and you need to have good attendance if you wanna keep it' (E2.UK1).

Employees believed that attending work did not jeopardize their employment status, as they did not go through the formal policy stages and therefore avoided absence investigations and any disciplinary hearings. In other words, based on employees' perception, in the era of austerity, when unemployment was significantly rising, avoiding the trigger of the formal absence review process secured their position on the shop floor. This again explains the drop in absence percentage within the two organizations.

Hence, the recession alone could not explain the drop in absence rates. This should be examined in correlation with the formidable absence policy, which inspired fear and job insecurity among employees across the shop floor. The formal policy was a centralized mechanism for controlling the employees' attendance behaviour, which contributed to the reduction in unplanned absence. This explains the reasons behind the significant drop in absence percentage in the two organizations.

7.1.2.2.1 Absence management in the day-to-day reality: What do Line Managers really do?

So far, this chapter has explored the formal absence policy within the two organizations, its impact on employees' absence behaviour and has illustrated the line managers' vital role within this process. Undeniably, line managers, in both cases, held a central role in the management of absence. Yet, data revealed an underlying behaviour by line managers in their role within the process, which influenced the day-to-day implementation of the policy.

Managers in both organizations considered the implementation of the absence policy as an extra task to their existing duties, distracting them from their overall role. Even though they acknowledged that absence management was part of their job, they also stressed that

they were extremely busy and they often had to multitask to complete their daily tasks. However, although absence management increased their workload, they stressed that they needed to make time for it because it '*needed to be done*'.

Line managers, in both cases, felt that absence management consumed a significant amount of their time. A line manager in UK2 described the whole process as time consuming. She discussed the time taken to contact absent employees, and the significant time spent finding someone to cover that shift and edit the working schedules. She stated

'[there is] lot of pressure on you, and it takes a lot of time out of your day'.

(LM2.UK2)

More data showed that in the two organizations line managers spent time on monitoring particular cases, having one-to-one meetings with the individuals and the HR managers, developing strategies for covering shifts, arranging shift-swaps, and editing the rotas. Managers in both cases felt distracted from their other responsibilities and neglected other tasks, while absence forcibly became a priority.

It is interesting to note that in both cases of this study the management of absence was routine for line managers. As the regional HR manager/UK1 commented, some line managers just '*tick a box*'. She suggested that new managers were process orientated, whilst others, such as night managers, focused more on the operational part of their job and regarded dealing with absence process as a distraction and annoyance. Similarly, an HR manager in UK2 argued that night managers were those who did not devote enough time to the process, and perceived it as just an extra task. She argued that they would still follow the process but they would try to finish it as soon as possible just to tick the box.

The majority of line managers perceived absence management and the process *per se* as a box-ticking exercise and part of their daily routine. For example, an employee in UK2 described the attitude of her manager in the attendance meetings as routinized, especially the first stage meeting. She suggested that managers followed their list of questions and asked the same questions every time. This showed that the first stage of the process was regarded as a standard exercise that the managers had to complete because they had to follow the process. Similar findings emerged in UK1 with employees suggesting that the 'green stage' meeting was a scripted procedure that the managers had to go through.

Yet, data provided convincing evidence that line managers had developed two major strategies to cope with this time consuming exercise. The first strategy was their attitude

through the meetings, and particularly the first stage of the policy. In both organizations, managers, and especially experienced managers, rushed through this meeting. As participants suggested, this practice saved time for the managers and helped them to overcome the repetition of the scripted process. In UK2 employees also commented that managers did not make full eye contact with the employee, they spoke very fast, and showed limited interest for the individual's personal circumstances.

Additionally the first stage of the absence policy was often a task delegated to supervisors. Section/Team Leaders, in both organisations, who directly reported to managers, carried out tasks such as call backs to absent employees and conducting the green-stage meetings. Moreover, data showed that managers, in both cases, gave a small amount of authority to supervisors regarding absence management. This included administrative work such as editing the rotas and updating absent employees for any changes during their absence. In UK2, the supervisors also authorized shift-swaps and took sick calls. Nevertheless, they always had to report to the manager and to keep them informed for any absences and changes on the rotas. Yet, this varied between the departments of the organization and it was mainly found on the checkouts because of the large number of people employed in this department.

7.1.2.3 Flexibility, the accommodation of attendance, and the drop in absence

The section above described the centralized absence policy in the two organizations and suggested it as a mechanism that contributed to the reduction of absence. However, the policy itself was not the single explanation for the drop in absence percentage. Although it was an important tool to manage absence and contributed significantly to the drop in absence, data revealed that the organizations had introduced more sophisticated tactics to manage attendance, aiming to prevent cases of absence.

Both companies focused on preventing absence rather than managing absence through the formal policy after it occurred. An HR manager in UK2 argued that although absence had always been monitored, the organization was now more interested in promoting prevention, rather than just following the process. Similarly, the regional HR manager discussed the change of focus for UK1, with 'flexibility' becoming the central path to manage absence. In both organizations, flexible working conditions became the core elements of absence management and consent building. The organizations offered alternative leave options and accommodated employees' personal circumstances, instead of individuals calling in absent and creating sickness files. The options offered were late

starts, holidays, unpaid leave, and shift-swaps. Both organizations encouraged employees to use these alternative leave options rather than be marked as absent. Employees in both organizations acknowledged the benefits of these options and discussed that following the 'flexibility route' did not impact on their personal absence and allowed them to balance their personal and working life, whilst also securing them from the risky formal policy and of receiving disciplinary warnings. As one employee in UK1 argued:

'For things that come up...they'll let you swap...without having you worry that they are gonna warn' (E8.UK1).

These options were used in a range of occasions that emerged outside of work, with the most common related to childcare issues, social obligations such as weddings or funerals, and periods of study leave for students. The flexibility options were used by the top management to prevent absences from occurring, as employees had alternatives to stay off rather than calling in sick. A line manager in UK2 discussed the drop in absence suggesting that giving people alternative options to stay off '*definitely helped*' to reduce the rate of absence.

Line managers in both cases encouraged employees to take alternative leave options to avoid high absence and keep the department's absence target low. Even in cases when the employee called in sick, managers offered alternative leave options rather than going through the formal policy. This was a practice used in both organizations and the store management team tolerated it, as it did not affect the store's overall absence and helped the store to stay 'green'.

In UK2, a range of short-term and long-term flexible leave was offered, such as unpaid leave (called '*me-time*'), shift-swaps, career-breaks, and study-breaks. These options were part of the formal policies of the organization and were included in the employee handbook and employees could use these as a substitute for sickness absence. However, these options were subject to restrictions and limitations. For example, regarding 'me-time', the employees were limited to five occasions of unpaid leave on an annual basis and that option needed to be agreed with the line manager. This was different for the shift-swap option. In fact, shift-swaps were the most commonly used 'flexible option' in both organizations. A line manager in UK2 stated that usually three shift-swaps happened on a daily basis in every area of the front-end. Similarly, employees stated that they used shift-swaps regularly, as this was a stress-free and easy way to be off work. Managers were tolerant of shift-swaps, as employees did not create an absence or missed a shift; therefore,

the department's operations were not disrupted. Although the line manager would still authorize the swap, the employees were free to find an individual to swap their shift as long as they passed the message to their manager. Understandably, employees held a degree of autonomy on swapping, whilst line managers were in control of unpaid leaves and holidays. Managers stated that although they needed to draw a line regarding unpaid leaves, this was not the case in the shift-swap option. These data evidenced that the flexibility options in UK2 were subject to restrictions and control by line managers, removing autonomy from employees' absence decisions, with exception of the shift-swap option.

In UK1, the store HR manager suggested that managing the process alone was not effective in tackling absence, and stressed the need to manage the absence culture on the shop floor through the introduction of the new 'flexibility policy'.

'We don't have an issue with absence in this store - we are on a green light for absence. This time two years ago we were a red light...we knew that we were doing everything we possibly could in terms of the process, there was nothing else we could do... there was nothing wrong with the process...whereas now we put something in [the] process that if you give us 48hours notice for the time off you are automatically given a "Yes"...we saw the benefits...rather have someone to phone in sick on Saturday [you have] someone to tell you on Wednesday, "I can't come in on Saturday". You then got time to cover it and deal with the problem rather than them phone in sick. So that was the culture change we put in place and it [is] surely working well for the store.'

(Store.HRM.UK1)

This store reduced its absence percentage within a period of 18 months, turning it from 'red' to 'green' and according to the store HR manager, this was the outcome of the new flexibility policy, which specified that if the employee gave the line manager 48 hours' notice for a leave then it was a guaranteed "Yes". This manager discussed a massive culture change in how they managed absence. She commented that the organization, through the implementation of the formal policy, as the main strategy to manage absence, did not take the time to listen to employees and understand their reasons for being absent as the needs of the company were seen to be more important. However, through the 48hours notice, line managers were able to spend more time understanding what was important in an employee's life, which 'makes the difference' as employees were able to

place more trust in their managers. There was a general perception that the organization helped employees and accommodated their personal circumstances. Therefore, this accommodative approach to attendance was the main dimension for consent making within the employment relationship.

This practice was happening before on a more informal level, but not consistently, whilst the current the 'flexibility policy' was becoming formal across the company. This policy was first trialled in this store and since it contributed to a significant drop in absence and the improvement of attendance, it became an official policy in stores with high rates of absence.

Line managers also stressed that this new process was an effective tactic to manage absence, recognizing the decline in unplanned absence and the reduction in sickness absence calls as a direct result of this new policy. They suggested that it was more beneficial to have an individual giving advance notice of their absence rather having someone who would call in on short notice leaving them limited time to cover that shift. Through this new policy, the line managers had adequate time to deal with absence, instead of facing unplanned absence when the manager had only two hours to find an individual to cover an absence through overtime. Thus, through this process, the company was able to be proactive in the management of unplanned and non-genuine absence, while simultaneously increased employee engagement and built consent.

The organization had integrated this policy with alternative leave options. When the employee followed the flexibility policy, the organization offered them unpaid leave, shift swap or holidays, which positively influenced the store's overall absence percentage. The overall store absence percentage dropped as the employees chose to use this flexible scheme to take time off, instead of following the costly formal process of "calling in sick", which affected their wages and their absence percentage, and consequently jeopardized their job status. This clearly proved that the organization had managed to control the absence culture, giving employees the impression that they were controlling their personal absence conditions. Employees suggested that before the introduction of this policy the only choice was to call in sick, adding to their personal absence and going through the formal absence policy stages. However, through the new policy the employees argued that they could go off work anytime they requested it, as long as they gave at least a two days' notice to their line manager.

However, line managers in UK1 discussed that often it was not possible for them to let people off, even with plenty of notice given. Managers argued that they could not afford to have many people on leave, no matter how much notice was given -they still needed to follow the demands of labour based on the system. Managers commented that they had to draw a line, and the authorization of time off through this policy was based on a ‘first come, first served’ practice. Some employees also recognized that when a lot of people asked for time off, there was no guarantee they would all get it, because then it would start to snowball with less employees available to cover the shifts or to take overtime.

Additionally, evidence demonstrated that the store management team had put restrictions in peak periods. Specifically, during busy trading times, for example at Christmas, there were limitations to the flexibility strategy. Although they did not suggest that they would not give people time off, the duration of the time off was shorter than what the employee requested or expected. The regional HR manager gave the example of the mother who wanted to attend her son’s school play and commented that the organization gave her a couple of hours off to attend that, as long as she returned back to work later on that day. Therefore, during the busiest times in stores, managers put restrictions in place, whilst maintaining the commitment to listen to employees and understand their personal circumstances. The employees continued to receive support from management to take time off and still held the perception that they could control their absence decisions, while the line managers were involved in a negotiation regarding employees’ attendance, promoting co-operation between the two.

To sum up, the age of austerity in combination to the “draconian” [sic] formal absence policy of the two organizations discouraged employees to go absent, whilst the new flexible approach towards absence management, offering to employees alternative options to take time off rather than calling in sick, contributed to the remarkable drop in absence levels and built consent, through cooperation. The combination of these findings explained the drop in absence in stores in both cases. However, more data evidenced the vital role of line managers within the two conflicting approaches to manage absence and showed that line managers were not only the key actors within these processes but their role was impacting on employees decision to attend (or not) work as it is discussed next.

7.1.2.4 Line managers, the catalyst for employees’ attendance and consent

In both organizations, line managers fulfilled a central role in the management of absence, with their personal management style being a key factor in determining employees’

decisions to attend work. Indeed, line managers encouraged or discouraged attendance through their essential role in absence management. As the regional HR manager in UK1 argued, employees did not work for the company but for the person who managed them, arguing that the relationship with their manager influenced their experience in work.

Indeed, in both cases, the majority of the participant employees argued that a good manager was a reason to attend work regularly and even attend when sick, whereas a bad manager was a reason to call in sick. The definition of good and bad manager varied across participants in the two organizations. However, some common characteristics emerged within the two cases. Specifically, participants described a good manager as one who was approachable, supportive, flexible, and understood and accommodated their circumstances, whilst a bad manager was one who lacked these characteristics. Employees argued that managers who were supportive to their personal issues encouraged them to attend work, whilst unsurprisingly, a bad manager encouraged non-attendance. As an employee in UK1 argued:

‘I think that if you have good managers you have kind of loyalty...[it] makes you want to go to your work’. (E12.UK1)

Likewise, a friendly manager and one ‘*you can speak to*’ discouraged non-genuine absence. One employee in UK2 argued that his current manager was very flexible and accommodated people’s needs, which discouraged employees to call in sick. This participant also provided a comparison between his current and his previous manager in the grocery department, arguing that the latter was not flexible, forcing employees to call in sick, unlike the former:

‘He [the previous manager] didn't even seem to be bothered to be flexible...in that respect you might think about sickness as an option, even though you are not sick. You felt like you are forced into phone in sick even if you are not ill, you felt like you wouldn't get the shift off you kind of forced to phone in sick’ (E1.UK2).

Data illustrated that there was a shift in managers’ perception regarding absence management which was in line with the organizations’ new approach to the use of flexibility and cooperation in managing attendance. Managers were more approachable and flexible, as the organizational focus on flexibility suggested, which led to the reduction of unplanned absence. Therefore, line managers’ attitude to absence management, with the

latter being more flexible and approachable and trying to accommodate individual and personal needs, explained the reduction in absence percentages within the two organizations. This was evident in both cases. For example, in UK1 the introduction of the new flexibility policy had altered line managers' attitude towards absence management where they became more approachable than before. Employees argued that they were not afraid or nervous to ask for time off, as they were before. A higher level of morale in the store was another factor in the improved attendance levels.

'If you are having a good relationship with your manager you feel ten times better coming to work...I would say if you feel comfortable with the manager then you feel so much better coming in and you feel better helping them. If you are doing a bad shift you don't mind as much [to attend] if you feel you are doing a personal favor to the manager that you like... I think their attitude is really crucial' (StoreHRM.UK1).

Similarly, in UK2 line managers recognized that their behavior was vital for '*colleagues [to be] happy to come to work*' and they stressed the need to be approachable to employees. Likewise a line manager in UK1 argued that in his department the absence levels were low and he related that to his attitude towards attendance, describing himself as a flexible manager.

Yet, one should not neglect the negative impact of this new approach. Undeniably, managers in both cases were encouraged by the new policies to be flexible and accommodate individuals on their requests for time off. However, data revealed employees' intentions to attend work while sick in order to not let down their manager. Unexpectedly, managers in both cases recognized that this behavior was positive for the organizations, neglecting the fact that line managers encouraged presenteeism, which might have generated further issues such as lower productivity or even future sick absences. For example, the regional HR manager/UK1 argued that she always encouraged managers to understand the difference they could make, as employees' decision to attend, even when sick, depended on the relationship with the line manager. She argued that if the manager supported employees when they needed it, employees would try to come to work even if they could not stay for the whole shift. This showed that UK1 encouraged presenteeism through line managers' role. Similarly a section leader in UK2 acknowledged that the behavior of managers impacted on employees' decision to stay off sick. She argues that employees regarded the impact of their absence on the department and their manager and

often attended sick in order not to let their manager down. Therefore, it is understandable that the emotional attachment to the manager often led employees to consent attendance even when being sick, and although this reduced the sickness absence levels for the organization, it was questionable whether this was positive for the individual or even for the organization.

7.1.2.4.1 Line managers' authority

Undeniably, line managers were the key actors for the implementation of both the formal policy and the flexibility approach, whilst their personal management style was a key factor affecting employees' intentions to attend work. Yet, further discussion with participants revealed the variations in line managers' authority in managing attendance. Line managers had minimal authority within the formal policy and slightly higher authority and discretion regarding the flexibility approach. Therefore, despite the findings suggesting that absence management was driven by line managers, more data showed that line managers were restricted within a top-down authoritarian regime.

In fact, there was a widespread recognition across the two organizations that line managers complied with the formal policy to the point that they passively followed the policy '*by [the] book*'. HR managers suggested that line managers followed the policy precisely and treated the policy as a black and white situation, neglecting any grey areas. These findings emerged through both case studies with line managers and employees affirming line managers' compliance with the formal policy. The colleague representative (UK2) argued that managers could not act beyond the process and they had to follow the process, whilst similarly, employees, in both organizations stated that from a business point of view '*that's the way they are doing it and that's it*' (E9.UK2) suggesting that managers could not escape the formal policy.

Line managers did not seem to dispute this view. In both organizations, managers strongly argued that they had to comply with the policy. They suggested that they needed to go through the process and everything was '*locked*' within the absence procedure.

'I follow the company policy by the book and I use the processes that are there and they help me [to] make sure that I don't have high absence' (LM1.UK1).

Interviews with line managers in the two organizations revealed that they perceived the formal policy as a safety valve to wrong decisions. Managers had suggested that following and complying with the formal policy, protected them:

‘I do want to go with the book...I want to follow the procedure to keep myself right more than anything’ (LM2.UK2).

This perception was universal across the two organizations. The regional HR manager/UK1 argued that the managers took great comfort from the fact that there was a clear set of policies, which allowed them to avoid grey areas. According to the managers, the policy removed uncertainty and the opportunity for favouritism, whilst it provided a framework to manage absence for the excessive number of employees within the stores. Evidence showed that line managers, in both cases, complied with the formal policy to ensure that absence was properly managed. On the other hand, not following the policy by book, based again on the interviews with the line managers, could get them in trouble, as one of them stated. Therefore, evidence implied the religious implementation of the process by line managers. This relates back to the need for consistency across the shop floor and the role of the HR manager in policing line managers’ actions, as well as to the latter’s perception that the absence policy provided a ‘safety net’ to their decisions.

It was apparent that the need for consistency across the organizations and the lean nature of food retail generated constraints to the managers’ role within the process. In both cases, line managers were closely monitored by the personnel department on how they managed absence, the decisions they took, and whether they followed the organizational policy. In UK1, interviews with the HR team revealed that the most difficult thing in managing attendance in food retail was the maintenance of consistency. The HR manager in UK1, argued that line managers held various degrees of capability and experience, which inevitably led to inconsistency in absence management. This, in conjunction with the fast pace of the business, necessitated the monitoring of line managers actions by the HR team, to ensure that they complied with the absence policy. Likewise, the HR Managers in UK2 reported a united view suggesting that monitoring line managers’ actions within the absence policy was part of their role, which aimed to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure.

Although line managers followed the policy by book, HR managers in both cases argued that absence was not a priority for the majority of line managers, explaining the necessity for them to police the formal process. They suggested that absence only became a priority when it occurred and when it became an issue for the department’s targets and argued that absence should have been a daily priority for the line managers as it was part of their role. They discussed the issue of consistency as not all the line managers gave absence the same

level of priority and that depended on the history of absence within the department. Thus, HR attempted to control the different levels of priority through the close surveillance and monitoring of line managers' actions.

Common difficulties emerged for HR managers in the two cases concerning the monitoring of night managers. In both organizations, HR managers discussed night managers as the most difficult group to monitor and keep track of in the way they managed absence. For example, an HR manager in UK2 argued that the night shift was the only department they struggled to monitor because the top management team did not meet them regularly. The night shift was isolated from the rest of the management team and thus this raised obstacles in monitoring line managers' actions within the absence process. Some endeavors by HR managers in both organizations were identified to fill this gap in communication. For example, they worked one to two back shifts per week to 'police' night managers.

However, despite the lack of communication between the two groups (HR and night managers), in the two organizations, the most commonly mentioned difficulty in the consistent implementation of the absence policy was the different nature of work for night managers, compared to the day-shifts. The main responsibility of the night managers was not customer service, but to prepare the store for the next day by stocking and filling all the shelves within a certain time. The store HR manager in UK1 suggested that the night managers got a certain number of hours to get the shop filled under time pressures. This was the only job in the organization, apart from online shopping, which was specifically time constrained - by 7am -when most of the customers started coming in the store and the tasks had to be completed.

Consequently, absence was not a priority for night managers in either UK1 or UK2. The intensive tasks and the time pressures on these managers drove them to become more task orientated, viewing absence management and absence policy as a distraction. Therefore, as an HR manager in UK2 argued, most of the grievances regarding absence were evidenced in the night shift, with employees arguing that their managers were not supportive regarding attendance. It was also found that the policy was often not followed. Finally, the Regional HR manager (UK1) stressed that this was probably the hardest department to influence in terms of keeping track of and following the formal policy.

Overall, the data from both case studies suggested that line managers, especially the day shift, were controlled in the way they managed absence to ensure consistency in the

process. What this showed is that line managers were constrained within the absence management process with the direct surveillance by HR specialists resulting in limited authority over absence management.

The limited authority of line managers was also evidenced through HR specialists' interventions. The latter group highlighted to line managers when the policy was not followed properly, and pointed out the necessary changes in their decisions in order to comply with the formal regulations. All the HR managers in this research commented that at some point they had to intervene and change line managers' decisions on absence.

Two of the HR managers, one in each case, suggested that the need for their intervention emerged through the lack of competencies and skill gaps of line managers. Often managers were described as unconfident or unwilling to follow the procedures and take the appropriate decisions. The store HR manager/UK1 accounted for this as a knowledge gap and a personal perception of line managers towards absence. She stated: '*[they] like to be liked and they won't be liked if they deal with absence*'. She continued saying that young managers or managers who did not deal with absence often, such as the stock control managers, lacked confidence with the process and often asked for her support and guidance. Conversely, she referred to the checkout managers who dealt with absence a lot and stressed that less intervention was needed by HR. An identical view emerged from an HR manager in UK2. He identified skill gaps for line managers, which were related especially to the conduct of investigations and disciplinary meetings. He argued that because most of the managers progressed from the shop floor they held shop floor knowledge but '*fell down*' in their HR role. However, he stated that managers who were involved in absence management frequently were more confident, whilst others would try to shy away from it; and at that point, the HR manager had to intervene.

Yet, it was illustrated that HR intervention was less likely to impact checkout managers who were described as more experienced, confident, and competent to deal with absence. Hence, checkout managers had slightly higher authority to manage absence, whereas less intervention by HR specialists was evident in their decisions. This is not though to suggest that they escaped the formal absence policy or the direct surveillance by specialists; this still occurred, although to a lesser degree.

Additionally, although the HR managers interviewed in the two organizations suggested that the policy had some scope for discretion for line managers, it was found that the latter's discretion and authority was related more to the flexibility options rather than the

formal policy. Evidence showed that line managers could not escape the absence policy and but they could show discretion with occasions related to the flexibility options. For example, one of the line managers in UK2 argued that they had to follow the policy; however, they could offer the individuals flexible leaves such as authorized leave or holidays. Equally, in UK1 the line manager was responsible for authorizing unpaid leaves as long as 48 hours' notice was given by the employee, giving them some discretion and higher authority within this process.

Yet, data revealed that line managers' discretion and authority was not limitless within this process. For example, in UK2 it was common for HR managers to intervene in line managers' decisions to ensure that the organization's regulations were followed. For example, concerning the 'me-time' [unpaid leave] one of the HR managers argued that in some cases, when the line managers gave somebody flexible working two or three times in a row, he had to intervene and said to them: *'don't do it as our policy says to give somebody up to five days a year'*. Yet, the line managers argued that they often asked for the top management's permission to authorize leave. For example, one suggested that she had the authority to give flexible leaves but she would have to explain her actions to the HR manager.

Overall, line managers, in both cases held a significant amount of discretion over the flexibility approach in comparison to the formal policy. The majority of employees in the organizations acknowledged managers' power over the authorization of flexible leave and argued that their managers were the actors they would approach to request flexible leave as only they could authorize that. Nevertheless, their authority and power was not limitless but was restricted by organizational regulations and their immediate manager's consent. The only option where the manager could demonstrate full authority and discretion was the shift swap option. In both cases, the line managers were the only actors who dealt with this option, as its impact on operations was minimal.

7.2 The Cyprus Experience

This section discusses the management of absence within the two Cyprus case studies. As will be further discussed, a drop in absence was evident in the data as a result of the recession and the role of line managers in managing attendance. What was surprising, however, was the absence of a formal written attendance policy in both organizations. Each organization adopted a conflicting approach to managing absence, nurturing feelings of insecurity on one hand, and offering accommodation to employee's circumstances on

the other. Despite the lack of a formal policy, line managers played a pivotal role in attendance management and consent making, although their authority varied across the organizations.

7.2.1 Understanding the absence behaviour

The discussion on absence within the two Cyprus cases opened with questions regarding the participant's latest incident of absence from work. Surprisingly, the majority of the interviewees in both cases reported that they were rarely absent, commenting that the only reason to go absent would be child sickness, which was indeed the most common reason for absence by female employees.

The majority of the employees in the two sites had dependent young children, whereas others were at the early stages of pregnancy. The store manager in Cy2 argued that the latter employees increased the absence occasions in the store, as they were often absent claiming pregnancy symptoms. Similarly, the financial manager in Cy1 commented that such phenomena were frequent and employees were using pregnancy issues as an excuse to stay off work, arguing though that it was not always genuine. However, he believed that because line managers would not risk refusing a pregnant employees' request to stay off work, the latter subsequently used the '*pregnancy card*' to take time off work, whereas line managers in both cases argued that they would not confront someone's request to stay off when their child was unwell.

Employees acknowledged that the managers were reluctant to refuse requests for days off for these reasons and were reluctant to take that responsibility. Yet, a closer look of the data showed that this was not a universal view. For instance, a checkout line manager in Cy1 argued that she would not confront a request for absence if the child was hospitalized but she would not accept any absences in the case of a small fever:

‘I’ll say to her, give them some Calpol³ and come to work...I am a mother myself and this is what I [would] do. If I can do it, so they can’ (LM1.Cy1).

Data in both organizations illustrated a suspicion among participants regarding the genuineness of the illness. Managers and employees in both companies commented that absence was usually non-genuine, arguing that often employees were claiming that their child was sick, or pretended to be sick themselves to stay off work. The checkout manager

³ Calpol is a children's medicine usually used to treat fever and pain.

in the Head-store/Cy1 suggested that this was a common phenomenon on the shop floor, especially on busy days such as Fridays and Saturdays.

Participants, in both cases, expressed the belief that employees would use sickness as an excuse to take time off work in case their formal request for time off or holidays was not approved by management. Managers also described cases when the employees called in sick because they knew that the shop floor would be busy, whilst employees commented that non-genuine absence was more prevalent after the new opening hours and the pressure to work extra hours, including Sundays. Although absence occasions were always common on Fridays and Saturdays due to the busy shop floor, currently, in both cases, non-genuine absence occasions were also a tactic to cope with the long and constant working hours.

‘Call in sick, is the easiest way to stay at home and get some rest, it is the easy solution, to lie and stay off. If you don’t do that, you can’t take any time off...we had Sundays off but now we have to work because there are not enough people in, therefore you call in sick’ (E8.Cy1).

Additionally, arguments in both cases showed that individuals were keener to call in sick if they did not like their job. For example, a line manager in Cy1 argued that younger checkout employees did not like their job and they did the job just for the money, or because their parents forced them to take the job. This was a reason she continued, for them to wake up in the morning and say, *‘I’m not going to work today, I’ll call in sick’* (LM5.Cy1). Along similar lines, but stressing a slightly different argument, the store manager in Cy2 argued that Cypriots, no matter their age, were those who called in sick most often. This view was also reported by a Bulgarian checkout employee in this organization who related this behaviour to Cypriots’ perception of the checkout job as a lower class job.

Finally, the majority of participants agreed that the checkout department had the higher absence in the store. Employees and managers in both cases discussed the nature of the checkout job as the main reason for absence, with employees feeling displeased with the tedious front-line job. Some commended that checkout employees would call in sick to cope with the physical and exhausting food retail job, whereas others suggested that the long working hours lead to absence.

7.2.2 Drop in absence: a dual explanation

Through the previous analysis, it is understandable that non-genuine absence was a problem in both organizations. Nevertheless, data revealed the decrease of incidences related to this behaviour. Although there were no numerical measures to prove the drop in absence in any of the two case study organizations, evidence in the interviews illustrated this trend. Participants commented that currently non-genuine absence was a less common phenomenon. The drop in non-genuine absence was due to two main reasons: the recession and the pressure by managers to attend. It was also found that presenteeism increased with employees attending work while being sick, complying, and consenting to workplace attendance.

7.2.2.1 The economic explanation of absence drop: The recession and attendance

Evidence from the two case studies showed that the current recession was the main driver for employees' decision to attend work. The majority of the participants pointed to rising unemployment as the main factor to attend work regularly, reporting feelings of job insecurity, and discussed the financial impact on their monthly salary. The HR manager in Cy2 clearly stated that non-genuine absence dropped, whilst similarly a checkout manager in the same company stated:

‘Before, this phenomenon was more common. Every day someone would call in sick. Not anymore; they are scared of losing their jobs...[if] the managers find out that [absence] was not genuine...it is difficult to find a new job nowadays’ (LM1.Cy2).

Managers in both cases have recognized a shift in the utilization of non-genuine absence by employees. For example, a line manager in Cy1, similarly to the store manager in Cy2, suggested that employees would *think twice* before calling in sick. The latter participant argued that before the employees were *‘playing the [absence] game safely’* because they knew that the organization would be more tolerant of such behaviours due to the limited labour on offer for food retailers in the labour market. This manager suggested that the society's view on the supermarket job as one of low status and the availability of other jobs made the organization tolerant of non-genuine absence. He commented that before the crisis, the Head Office would not approve any dismissals because it was very difficult to find someone to cover the position. However, currently employees were dispensable as plenty of job applicants were available to cover working posts.

Indeed, interviews with employees in both cases confirmed the drop in absence. Participants commented that there was a general feeling of job insecurity across the shop floor, which was a major factor that prevented workers from calling in sick when they were genuinely ill. They discussed increasing unemployment in the country and the difficulties of finding a new job in the market in comparison to previous years, as having the most crucial influence on attendance. This was more intense in Cy2 though, with employees in this organization reporting feelings of job insecurity and pressure to attend work because of the recent redundancies.

Additionally, interviews in both cases showed that employees were also sceptical of being absent due to the financial cost accompanied with this behaviour, whilst often they attended sick. For example, one employee in the food-section/shelves in Cy1 recalled an incidence when her colleague attended work with a sore leg because she needed the money. A line manager in Cy2 described a similar case with an employee who attended work while sick on a Sunday shift so as not to lose the overtime pay. Therefore, it is understandable that employees attended work sick or not fit to carry out their job because they could not afford to lose a day's payment.

What is important to highlight here is not only the reduction of non-genuine absence but also a general reduction in the number of 'sick calls'. Employees tended to attend work sick because of the fear of losing their job. A checkout manager in Cy1 described the case of an employee who attended work with an infected eye. She stated that this individual attended work to prove to her manager that she was genuinely sick and she was eventually sent home, whilst participants in both cases discussed this new behaviour as the result of the economic crisis with employees attending work sick so as not to jeopardise their employment status. Understandably, the current recession was a major driver for employees to comply with regular attendance and the emergence of presenteeism in these two organizations.

7.2.2.2 The sociological explanation of presenteeism: The line managers' role

The data so far has revealed presenteeism as an emerging behaviour within the two organizations, primarily because of the economic crisis and the increasing fear of dismissal due to personal absence. Although the majority of participants recognized the latter as the source for presenteeism, more data revealed a more complex explanation for this behaviour, which was related to the line managers' role in managing absence with the latter forcing employees to attend at work, even when sick. However, this finding was not

evident in both organizations. The research evidence illustrated different tactics on the shop floor within the two companies. Line managers in Cy1 were less tolerant of absence and pressured employees to attend at work while being sick, whilst in Cy2 there was no data to suggest such behaviour for line managers. Although in Cy2, some suggested that one particular line manager pressured employees to attend by making them feel guilty for their absence, she would not force them to attend while sick.

Data in Cy1 showed that it was common for managers, especially in store2/Cy1, not to accept sickness as a reason for absence and forced employees to attend at work while sick, in contradiction to previous findings, suggesting that managers would not tolerate personal sickness or child sickness. One checkout employee (store2/Cy1) described the case when her line manager forced her to attend at work while her two-year old son was in the hospital. She argued that although she was holding a doctor's note, the manager asked her to attend at work because she could not cover the necessary labour needs of the shift. *'I had no other option but to come to work'*, stated the employee, suggesting that this was a common phenomenon in the store. A young part-time employee in the same store stated:

'What's the chance to call in sick? Three days ago, Kathrine had a swollen eye and they forced her to come in to show that she did have a swollen eye...they force you to come in the store to ensure that you are genuinely sick. But even if they don't bring you in, you'll have a third degree via phone: "Did you go to the doctor, when did you go, what did he say, when are you going again". All those questions to catch you in case you are lying' (E9.Cy1).

This data clearly showed that line managers in store2 were suspicious over non-genuine absence and often forced employees to attend work even while feeling unwell. Therefore, presenteeism was a behaviour that was bred by the line managers' intolerance of absence, either genuine or non-genuine, while, additionally, in this way the line managers controlled workplace attendance through coercion.

Surprisingly, the managers in this store described their actions as legitimate and necessary in order to carry out the tasks and provide a good service to the customers. For example, a checkout manager in Store2/Cy1 admitted that she might ask someone who is sick to attend work:

‘The fact that she has some fever doesn’t mean that she shouldn’t be at work. Take some Panadol [painkillers] and come. When you can’t cover the shift there is nothing else you can do’ (LM1.Cy1).

Managers preferred to have enough bodies on the checkouts, even if they could not carry out their work to the best of their ability. They suggested that absence generated longer queues and delays in customer service, stressing the necessity of full attendance, even when employees attended while sick.

Although this seemed an extreme practice, one that was mainly found in store2/Cy1, data showed that managers in the Head-store/Cy1 also encouraged presenteeism through similar actions but with a less aggressive attitude. For example, LM3 in this store commented that she might ask an employee to attend sick for a couple of hours in order to cover part of her shift. Therefore, despite managers arguing that they did not force employees to attend work when sick, data showed that line managers, especially in Head store/Cy1, and to some cases in Cy2, negotiated attendance with employees, to avoid the impact of sickness absence on the targets and the customer service.

7.2.2.2.1 Line managers, the catalyst for employees’ attendance

The majority of the participant employees in both cases commented that their decision to attend work depended on line managers’ support so they could balance their work and personal life. In other words, participants suggested that they would not be absent on a regular basis for managers who accommodated their personal circumstances, whereas they would be more likely to call in absent for managers who did not support them. For example, a checkout employee in the Head office/Cy1 commented that her line manager was familiar with all employees’ issues outside work and accommodated their needs. She suggested that she would never be [non-genuinely] absent for this particular manager because she felt obliged to attend work, as her manager accommodated her personal needs outside of work. The majority of the participants identified the latter manager as one who supported their personal needs and they all suggested that they would not go off sick without a genuine reason when this manager was on duty. This line manager commented that when she was first promoted to manager she was not as flexible as she is today, mainly due to the fear of scapegoating (more discussion below). However, she did state that by gaining more experience on the front-end over the years, she had realized that higher flexibility and empathy with workers personal needs outside of work were the

mechanisms to manage attendance and eliminate non-genuine absence. Indeed, she commented that by accommodating employees, she observed a significant drop in absence.

This was a tactic followed by the majority of participant line managers across the two organizations. Line managers in both cases perceived flexibility as a form of preventing absence, whilst employees similarly discussed the scheme of ‘a favour back’. In other words, line managers expected employees to return the favour for supporting their personal circumstances outside work, and accommodating their requests for time off. For example, a checkout manager in Cy2 stated that she was deliberately empathetic to her subordinates in order to gain space to request a favour in return, such as overtime work.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of respondents stated that they would attend work even when sick for those managers who accommodated their personal circumstance in order to prevent them from receiving any hassle: *‘I might be sick and come at work; I don’t like to inconvenience my manager (E11.Cy1)’*. Data revealed that this behaviour -presenteeism- was especially common in Cy1 when ‘flexible’ line managers were on duty, whilst in Cy2 there was insufficient data to conclude whether this behaviour was evident across the store. Therefore, the ‘favour back’ approach taken by the line managers in Cy1 generated feelings of obligation for employees to attend work, even when sick. In other words, this approach surfaced ‘presenteeism’ with employees attending work when sick, as they did not want to let down or affect the manager who previously supported them.

Indeed, data in Cy1 revealed incidences of employees attending work with high fever, sore arm, or sore back, and generally unable to carry out their duties. Although the economic crisis the authoritarian approach by some managers towards absence could explain presenteeism due to feelings of job insecurity, these participants clearly stated that they attended sick due to the support they received from their manager and therefore, they were paying the favour back. Besides, as more data clearly showed employees did not exhibit the same behaviour for managers who did not support them with their personal needs. In fact, the majority of participants in both organizations were keener to call in absent for a bad manager who was not supportive and not flexible. The employees in the two cases made a distinction between a good and a bad manager based on how flexible and supportive they were to their personal life circumstances and suggested that they would probably not attend for a bad manager. One employee in Cy1 stated:

‘[For a bad manager] even if it was not something serious I would not attend at work and I would bring a sick line and I don’t care how she would cover

that...[whereas] for the good manager I will not even think about it. I will say to her that she doesn't have to worry about me, I will never let her down' (E3.Cy1).

Participants in both cases suggested that every manager had a different style to deal with absence requests, with some being sympathetic and trying to accommodate employees, while others always declined any requests for time off. For example, the frozen-section line manager in Cy2 suggested that the previous line manager did not approve any annual leaves and generally did not accommodate employees requests for time off, which was reflected in higher rates of absence in the department. Currently as the same manager suggested, because he adopted a more flexible approach, absence seemed to be less of a problem. Similarly, a checkout employee in Cy1 discussed the case of a checkout manager who was not interested in employees' circumstances and forced them to attend at work and consequently generated absence intentions. It is interesting to quote this participant's recollection of these events, which she described in tears:

'My child was very sick, it was an emergency, and I asked her to leave work. She turned to me and said: 'I'm sick of listening about your baby'... All she was interested was to do the job. She said in my face that she is tired to listen for my baby...after that I was coming in and I wanted to leave. I was looking at her and I was getting angry. I said to myself so many times that I didn't want to come in. (E4.Cy1)

The store manager in Cy2 explained that an absence intention was a behaviour that emerged because of the tensions generated between the manager and the employee:

'A bad manager is a reason for non-attendance. An employee who is happy with the company, and that includes the relationship with the line manager will not use that card. (Store.manager.Cy2)

A senior manager in Cy1 similarly argued that any incidences of non-genuine absence in a department were the result of non-effective management by line managers. He suggested that absence was the outcome of an incompetent line manager and he held line managers accountable for their subordinates' absence behaviour. The manager continued suggesting that the nature of the supermarket job, which was repetitive and low paid, could not change. Therefore, as he stated, the only variable that could influence employees' attendance intentions, was their relationship with their line manager. Similarly, a line

manager in the same organization suggested that the management style of the superior and their general behaviour during working hours were the main reasons affecting employees' decision to attend at work, commenting that an authoritarian manager was a reason for non-attendance:

‘When your manager tells you off all the time and insults you...you just don't want to attend. If my manager was like that, I wouldn't want to go in and I would find excuses to be absent (LM5.Cy1).

All the line managers, in both cases, argued that they had to balance an authoritarian style with a more friendly approach, depending on the circumstances and the individual that they were dealing with. They felt that they should be strict to ensure that employees carried out the tasks properly and prevent them from being marked out by their superiors as incompetent. Yet, this generated an environment of fear and insecurity. What was surprising though was the significant number of employees who commented that the autocratic style and fear was the only way for the line managers to control the departments.

Overall, line managers adopted an authoritarian style on the line in order to control the shop floor order, to protect themselves from being exposed as incompetent to the top management and to carry out the daily departmental tasks. Yet, some managers have pushed the autocratic management style to the extreme with employees suggesting that often their style was insulting and demeaning. This extreme style was a driver for employees' decision not to attend at work, whilst workers utilized non-genuine absence or shift swaps to avoid the autocratic line manager. Additionally, line managers adopted an accommodative approach to workplace attendance, which explains how line managers built consent to attendance through this 'give and take relationship'.

7.2.2.2.2 The micro-politics of the group and the management absence

Beyond the discussion regarding line managers' management style and the impact on employees' attendance decisions, this section discusses the micro-politics within the groups as a mechanism by line managers to manage absence. In particular, it was evidenced that the formation of cliques and gossip were key mechanisms for line managers to manage the absence behaviour.

In both organizations, participants commented on the existence of cliques within the workplace. Data revealed that the line managers in both cases were those who formatted the cliques in an attempt to manage the dynamics within their teams. This was a common

finding between the two cases. For example, the senior manager in Cy1 discussed the case of store2 where, as he commented, the store was divided in two camps with one checkout line manager leading the first clique, whilst the shop floor manager led the second one.

In both cases, the years of experience in the store were the main criterion for employees to join a clique and enjoy the line managers' 'laid-back' behaviour. Line managers in both cases were recruiting in their clique employees who had longer years of service in the organizations and employees who were keener to help them carry out the daily tasks. A young part-time employee in Cy2 suggested that line managers showed favouritism for employees who were working more years in the organization compared to the younger employees, primarily because they knew them better as they had been working together as checkout operators. A similar view was raised by a checkout operator in Cy1 with ten years' experience in the organization, commenting that managers adopted a different attitude to her compared to younger employees, suggesting that line managers were more tolerant of her mistakes and requests for absence.

Regardless of the sources and the criteria for the formation of the cliques within the two organizations, what it is important to emphasize is the impact on the employment relationship. In fact, in both organizations, but more noticeably in Cy1, cliques were used as a mechanism by line managers to manage employees' behaviour on the shop floor and particularly the attendance behaviour. To explain more, line managers were more tolerant of absences of members within their clique, and were keener to accommodate their personal needs and to amend their working time. As one checkout employee in Cy1/store2 put it:

‘There are cliques on the front end and all start from the manager. There are girls who feel that they have a sort of immunity to do some things. For example, she feels [that] I'm with group A and that manager is on shift today, I can leave my till, walk around, she won't say anything. She can even call in and say I'm not coming today. Whilst, others would be more careful that day because they belong to the opposite group/clique (E10.Cy1)

The quote above clearly demonstrates that identification with an informal clique was a variable influencing employees' behaviour on the shop floor, depending whether the leader of the clique was on duty. In fact, employees adjusted their behaviour appropriately if their 'leader' was on the same shift as them. Hence, line managers through the formation of cliques were able to manipulate both the attendance and the overall employee behaviour

on the shop floor, adopting a more soft or hard managerial style for employees who were or were not in their sub-team. This shows that the cliques were the platform for line managers to manage and negotiate workplace attendance, as well as the shop floor order, depending on the individual's identification with a particular clique.

Another behaviour found to be attached to the in-group construction was the utilization of gossip as a mechanism to manipulate employees' absence behaviour and to control the employees' attendance behaviour. In particular, line managers were using gossip to pinpoint employees' absence behaviour as a transgression to the terms and conditions, especially for those who were not part of their clique. Gossip was a common behaviour on the two shop floors. Participants related this (mis)behaviour to the feminization of the food retail job, with data showing that line managers were utilizing gossip more than anyone else did on the shop floor. The line managers were the facilitators of this misbehaviour and this was ratified through the formation of cliques.

What is interesting in this data is that line managers were using the gossip as a mechanism to manage the absence behaviour on the shop floor. For example, participants in both cases suggested that although line managers were accommodating their personal needs to take time off work this was accompanied with unjustified rumours by line managers for non-genuine absence. For instance, a checkout operator in Cy2 stated: *'she will help you to swap or stay at home for the day; but she will chitchat behind your back (E11.Cy2)*. Likewise, a checkout employee in Cy1 commented:

'We do swap between us. You can do that, but they [line managers] will say words behind you. They [will] say that you are asking too much and that you always swap your shifts (E9.Cy1).

Gossiping by line managers in regards to employees' absence was as a successful tactic used to manipulate the latter's absence behaviour. Data illustrated a lack of trust by employees towards line managers and a fear of gossiping. Consequently, employees were less keen to be absent due to the gossiping behaviour of line managers: *'you are afraid they are going to comment that between them'* argued a checkout employee in Cy1. Employees talked about feelings of insecurity regarding their intentions to be absent because of the tendency by line managers to gossip about this behaviour as it was commonplace for this gossiping to be transferred to higher management. As a checkout operator in Cy2 stated, her previous line manager was gossiping about all requests for absence and absence calls with HR, as well as the store manager. Therefore, as she

continued, employees tried to avoid requesting any time off from this particular manager, as they were afraid of being reprimanded by the store manager.

This situation was common in both cases. The fact that both organizations did not monitor and measure individual absence made line managers suspicious towards this behaviour and this subsequently resulted in gossiping, in an attempt by the latter to avoid taking the responsibility for non-genuine absence in their team. For example, a checkout employee in Cy1 discussed the case of the checkout manager who '*spread the news*' of an individual's absence across the organization, including top managers in Head Office, suggesting that it was not genuine and that it inconvenienced her. Through reporting the absence calls, and even requests for time off to the top management, she managed to tackle non-attendance behaviour through generating feelings of insecurity to employees, as in the era of austerity the latter did not want to be reported to top management as regular absentees.

Overall, it is understandable that the social interaction between the line manager and the employee was in both cases a mechanism to manage absence behaviour. The existence of cliques within both organizations showed the different attitude by line managers towards attendance behaviour for different employees, depending whether the latter were part of their sub-group. This showed that line managers used both cooperation and coercion to secure attendance and shop floor order and their approach depended on the employees' identification with the clique. Similarly, gossip was another mechanism utilized by managers to control attendance through generating insecurity to their subordinates in an attempt to reduce any absence occasions. The emergence of this tactic again depended on whether the employee was part of their clique. To give further explanation, for employees who were under the 'protection' of the line manager, the latter would not gossip the former's absence and would adopt a cooperative approach. On the contrary, line managers would gossip employees' absence for those who were not part of their clique, and they would adopt a coercive approach. It is important to note at this point that the absence of a formal policy, as described below, was the driver for the micro-politics within these groups.

7.2.3 Policy, What Policy?

Managers in both cases suggested that policies and procedures were developed by the Head offices and communicated to the stores. However, the review the policy guide in Cy1 revealed the absence of a formal 'attendance policy' and despite the fact that the researcher had no access to secondary data in Cy2, interviews surprisingly revealed the absence of a

written attendance policy, as well as the absence of any formal targets regarding absence. This is not to say that the two organizations did not manage attendance on the shop floor. As the next section shows, both companies adopted a best practice approach to manage absence.

7.2.3.1 The absence management and the role of line managers

At this point, the discussion will focus on the daily practices implemented in the two cases regarding the management of attendance. Although, the absence of a formal policy in both cases was evident, the available data seems to suggest that an identical best practice approach was adopted by both organizations to manage absence, with line managers being the key actor to implement this process. Nevertheless, their authority was subjected to restrictions as is discussed later in this section.

In both cases, the employees were obliged to call their line manager before the start of their shift to report their absence. In Cy2, this was included in the terms and conditions of the employment contract, whereas in Cy1 there were no written regulations specifying this practice. As the line managers/Cy1 suggested it was a common sense that this was the process to follow.

Because of the lack of formal guidelines, employees in the two cases discussed different managers to whom they would report their absence. For example, in Cy2 most of the employees reported to the HR manager as the first contact to report their absence, although the latter argued that the line manager should be the first contact for the employee. This was a new process within the organization with the HR manager devolving this responsibility to the line. Indeed, since the store first opened and until 2012, the HR manager was responsible for absence management. She received all of the absence calls and decided how to cover absence. Although the latter task was still the responsibility of the HR manager, she discussed the necessity to devolve the absence calls to line managers because of her excessive workload. This HR manager went on the stress that managing absence was a disruption because of the bureaucratic nature of her job, and suggested that improving lines of communication between her and the employees was key to managing absence. Therefore, all the employees in Cy2 were encouraged to contact their line manager in the first instance when reporting their absence. Although younger employees followed this process and were aware that their line manager as the first point of contact, the employees who were already working for the organization did not recognize line

managers' authority to manage absence and suggested that they would always contact HR. As one participant stated:

'She [line manager] is just another employee, we all do the same job...She doesn't have power as a manager' (E7.Cy2).

A contradictory case emerged in Cy1. Although the management of absence was not guided by any formal regulations, data revealed a uniformity and consistency across the two stores with employees reporting their absence to their line manager. Employees recognized line managers' authority and suggested that they would not disregard their line managers and they would not report absence to someone hierarchically above them.

Nonetheless, employees in both cases argued that they would always report their absence to management (HR or line manager) as soon as possible in order to give them time to cover the post. The HR manager in Cy2 suggested that it was important to be informed early for someone's absence so that they had enough time to put a plan in place and cover the absence, arguing that the latter action was a high priority.

Whilst similar views emerged through the interviews with store managers in both companies, the interviews with line managers were inconclusive in terms of whether covering absence was a priority. Line managers in Cy1 argued that absence would not be a priority on quiet days, whilst conversely it would become a high priority on busier days in order not to affect customer service. Conversely, a checkout manager in Cy2 argued that absence management was always a priority because the store was currently operating on the minimum amount of labour. Thus, in Cy2, because of the recent redundancies, absence incidences had a greater impact on the store's operations. Yet, a closer look at the data showed that in both cases covering absence was a higher priority for checkout managers, unlike in other departments, with participants suggesting that the impact of absence was higher on the checkouts, due to the direct impact on the customer service.

A variety of strategies was used to cover absences in the two cases. A common practice was to call an employee and ask them to attend work earlier or later on in the day in order to cover the rush hours in the store. A similar practice was to call employees who were on holidays to attend work. This was a practice found in both cases and generated feelings of frustration among the employees. A checkout operator in Cy1 stated in an angry tone:

You have your day off and they call you to come in. My friend had her day off, she was at the beach, and they called her to come to work. She had to be here at 2 o'clock whether she wanted to come or not...you may have a week off, you plan your holidays to go to Ayia Napa and the second day they call you in. Wherever you are, you need to come at work. (E9.Cy1)

In Cy2, although the HR manager argued that the latter practice was rarely implemented, the employees suggested that this practice was more frequent after the redundancies because of the limited amount of individuals available to cover absences.

Two more covering practices were identified within the data. Firstly, managers in both organizations utilized overtime to cover unexpected absence. Employees were asked to work extra, sometimes up to four hours, in order to cover the busy shop floor. However, they were not paid extra for these working hours; rather the managers would allow them an early finish on a quiet day. Secondly, in Cy1 the support between the stores was also a common practice to cover absences. Yet, this tactic was mainly used for posts that could not be covered within the store such as the butchery.

Finally, the most common and most widely used practice in the two organizations was the support from other departments. This was particularly the case for absences on the front-end, where on busy days employees from the shop floor were covering absent checkout operators. As was discussed earlier, both organizations had developed a multi-skilling strategy, providing checkout training to most employees on the shop floor. This practice worked both ways with checkout operators receiving training in other departments to cover absence incidences. However, the latter was practiced mainly on quieter days of the week and would rarely be used on weekends.

Finally, due to the absence of a formal policy, endeavours to control non-genuine absence were identified in the two cases. To be more specific, employees on their return to work had to hand in a sick line to their line manager to prove the genuineness on their absence. This was a common practice across the two organizations, which was utilized more over the last two years. Although the HR manager in Cy2 argued that not all absence occasions were related to sickness, it was common for managers to ask for a doctor's note. Similar practice was exercised in Cy1. However, although this was common in the two stores, more data found that this was not always the case, as some managers would be more tolerant of absence and the sickness note, depending to the reason of absence. As some line managers have suggested, for a one-day absence or for absence other than sickness,

the employees did not have to hand a sick line. However, most managers would still ask for a sick line for absences longer than two days and especially for employees who they suspected were not genuine.

7.2.3.1.1 Line managers' authority

What is interesting to stress at this point is the different levels of authority given to the line managers to decide how the above practices would be implemented. The discretion of line managers varied across the different stores. For example, in Cy2 line managers argued that only the HR manager could decide how the absence was to be covered. Although the HR manager did not accept this view and suggested that she worked closely with the line managers to cover absences, data showed that she was in control of all the decisions related to absence. Besides, as one of the checkout line managers in Cy2 argued, the HR manager had the authority to manage absence and she could not take any decisions without her approval.

Similarly, in store2/Cy1 the store manager would take any decisions regarding absence, whereas only the line managers in the Head-store/Cy1 had the autonomy to manage absence. In this store in particular, line managers had full authority to decide whether they would send a checkout operator to cover in another department and they would allocate shop floor employees on the checkouts in a case of absence. Conversely, in Store2, although the line manager would take the decision to send an employee to another department, this had to be approved by the store manager. The store manager in this store had full control over the employees' mobility across the store, and she was the manager who would approve such decisions. The line managers could not take any decision without the approval of the store manager, who admitted that she wanted to have full control of what was happening in all the departments across the store. She commented that the line managers' role was an extension of her role, suggesting that the latter were incompetent and would struggle to manage the employment relationship.

The evidence demonstrated that the store manager was policing line managers' actions and demanded that they account for their actions. A checkout line manager in the Head store of Cy1 confirmed this argument stating:

‘Mary [store manager/store2] is a control freak. She wants to handle everything, the rotas, the holidays the absences, everything; just because she doesn’t trust the supervisors...even when a girl is sick she demands the employees to call her, not the line manager. Even if she is on a leave, she still wants them [line managers] to inform her of what is happening’ (LM4.Cy1).

Understandably, line managers’ authority level in this store depended on the autonomy given by the store manager, whereas data revealed that line managers in the Head Store enjoyed higher authority within the employment relationship, in comparison to their peers in Store2. Particularly, they commented that the preparation of rotas and the management of absence, including tasks such as contacting absent employees, covering absences, and editing the rotas were exclusively their responsibilities.

To sum up, although in both cases there was an absence of a formal process to manage employee absence, the two organizations attempted to tackle absence, and particularly non-genuine absence, through the introduction of a formal guidance specifying that employees had to hand the managers a sick line or a note to justify their absence. Yet, in Cy1, it was up to the line manager’s discretion as to whether they would ask for that note, whereas in Cy2 the HR manager was always asking for the note, depending on the reason of absence.

7.2.3.2 Working time and flexibility to tackle non-genuine absence

Although previous data showed that in both organizations, managers were attempting to control non-genuine absence through an authoritarian command, there is more evidence corroborating the notion that within the two organizations managers adopted a humanitarian and accommodative approach towards attendance. As a line manager in Cy1 stated:

‘Above all with are humans, we empathize we our workers. My role is to manage peoples’ personal issues, as long as they do their job right’ (LM4.Cy1).

Similarly, employees argued that line managers often accommodated peoples’ needs and adjusted the rotas to accommodate their outside work responsibilities, where this was possible, resulting in less non-genuine absence calls.

Managers have utilized flexible practices to accommodate employees’ needs and achieve work-life balance, while at the same time tackling non-genuine absence, through consent building. These practices, however, were not formal policies or part of the HR strategy in

either Cy1 or Cy2; rather a best practice approach was adopted on the shop floor. Data revealed six main common practices utilized by management in the two organizations, notably: shift swaps; notice to line managers; early leave; late starts; unpaid leave and a one/two-hour break.

Unpaid leave was a less common practice used by employees due to the part-time working scheme, the low wages, and the current economic crisis. Alternatively, shift swap was the most common practice used in the two cases. In the two companies, both managers and employees suggested that shift swapping was the easiest solution to avoid absence, with an HR manager in Cy2 commenting that on a daily basis there were always numerous swaps across the departments on the shop floor. Managers in both cases argued that as soon as the employee had found someone to swap their shift with they would approve it. Surprisingly, in both cases, the line manager was not involved in finding a swap for the employee. The latter was responsible for finding someone to swap with which would then be passed to the line manager for approval. Nine out of ten times the managers in both cases would not decline this request due to the minimal impact on the department's operations. As more data revealed, this approach was relatively new for managers in Cy1, whilst before the managers refused to change the rotas and did not approve any shift swaps. However, a shift in managers' attitude was evident, enhancing flexibility and accommodating employees' needs to avoid non-genuine absence.

This new approach, with flexibility being a key element, was evident in both organizations. Similarly to shift swaps, employees in both cases could give one-weeks' notice to the line managers who were responsible for preparing the rotas and organising the shifts. However, employees had to put a request before the preparation of the rotas and preferably give seven to ten days' notice. Line managers in Cy1 had full authority to accommodate this request. This was not the case in Cy2 where although line managers had some degree of authority regarding these requests, they always had to report to the HR manager. Besides, as data revealed, the rotas always had to be approved by the HR manager in Cy2, unlike in Cy1.

Three more practices were identified within the data regarding the flexibility approach, namely: early leave, late starts and one-hour breaks. Employees could put in a request to their manager to leave earlier, either because of sickness or due to responsibilities outside of work, and they could also ask for a late start or permission to leave work for up to two hours to sort out issues outside of work, such as to visit the bank, before returning to work.

Whatever option employees chose, they had to cover the missed hours through unpaid overtime. It is important to note that line managers in all cases had full discretion in making those decisions and allowed employees to leave early, come in late, or take longer breaks. What it is also important to note is that these practices were used as part of the informal flexibility practice within the two organizations, in an attempt to tackle non-genuine absence through this accommodative approach and consent making. Finally, the line managers' crucial role in the success of the latter practice should also be acknowledged.

7.2.3.3 Line managers' fear of responsibility and their consent to the limited authority

As data has shown so far, line managers did not enjoy full autonomy within their managerial province; an argument well recognized by participants in both organizations. Nevertheless, there is convincing evidence in the data, suggesting that line managers consented the limited authority of their role due to feelings of fear in taking responsibilities related to people management.

The senior managers in both organizations emphasized the latter argument, discussing that line managers avoided taking on any responsibilities and making any decisions regarding the management of their team. For example, the store manager in Cy2 suggested that line managers did not want to take any initiatives or be accountable for responsibilities related to the employment relationship. Similarly, the financial senior manager in Cy1 highlighted line managers' hesitation to carry out the tasks attached to their managerial role, suggesting that they were afraid to be criticized for poor performance. He also discussed the lack of competences and the reluctance to identify themselves as part of the management team. Therefore, as he continued, line managers sought for confirmation of their actions by the top management.

'They perceive themselves as workers [and not managers]...because they progressed from the shop floor...and this is obvious by the fact they avoid to take any decisions... for example, an employee calls in absent, they will go straight to Costas [store manager] to ask for guidance, they don't take the initiative to cover the absence...I strongly believe they lack the skills to deal with management issues and I don't believe most of them [have] got the instinct of responsibility (Senior Manager.Cy1)

Clearly, line managers were always seeking approval from for the top management to carry out the tasks delegated to them in relation to their managerial role, particularly issues related to working time and the management of absence. This was a finding that was common in both organizations as evidence in Cy2 also confirmed that line managers were shying away from their managerial duties. For example, one checkout employee in this organization discussed the case of a particular line manager who always refused to take any absence calls and directed employees to contact the HR manager, despite the guidance given by the top management that the line manager should be the first point of contact.

The fear of responsibility was also a theme that emerged from the interviews, with line managers in the two organizations pointing out that they would prefer responsibilities, such as absence management, to be taken away from their role. There was an extensive discussion with participant line managers regarding their role in managing absence, which suggested that the tasks devolved to the line resulted in increasing workload and feelings of stress for line managers. Therefore, they were keen to let HR and top managers deal with absence.

Line managers perceived their managerial role, and particularly their involvement in people management with an emphasis on the management of absence, as a distraction from their commercial role. They discussed the time spent managing absence occasions, whilst they also suggested that if the HR specialists took such responsibilities then they would deliver their commercial tasks more effectively. A checkout manager in Cy1, when asked whether she would prefer the HR to undertake absence management, stated:

‘Yes! Definitely! We have so many responsibilities...the rotas, the absences, all that stuff...And there are so many people on the front-end. You have to deal with every employee’s issues individually, prepare and edit the rotas appropriately and accommodate their needs...it takes so much time when you also have to deliver other tasks and serve the customers...it’s impossible. So yes, that would be nice.’
(LM2.Cy1)

The same manager also discussed the process of managing individuals’ personal needs and described the process as mentally tiring and suggested that if she had the option not to deal with absence she would take it. This explains the practice of constant reporting to the HR manager regarding any requests for absence or absence calls. Data showed that this line manager was trying to avoid being involved in a discussion with employees regarding their needs outside work. Instead, these needs would be reported to the HR specialist, thus

removing this 'daunting' process from her workload, transferring it to the HR manager and avoiding the responsibility of approving or declining absence requests.

Justifiably, the senior manager's view that line managers were scared to take on management responsibilities was confirmed through the interviews with the latter group in both organizations. Data confirmed that they shied away from such tasks, whilst they always sought guidance before making a decision. Therefore, the limited authority was not only emerging through the tight control by the top management but also through line managers' constant pursuit of agreement for their practices by their superiors. Hence, it was evident that line managers consented to limited authority within their managerial role in order to cope with the time-consuming and daunting process of managing absence.

More data revealed line managers' fear of being criticized for poor performance. The majority of the line managers in both cases had been promoted to this position after years of experience as shop floor workers. As was clearly evidenced, they held great knowledge on the commercial part of their role, but had difficulties in delivering their managerial duties, leading to "feelings of incompetence", and hesitation in delivering their HR responsibilities. Line managers were afraid to be criticized for poor performance, thus the HR responsibilities were not always welcome. Interviews with line managers also revealed that they worried that top management would blame them for any mistaken actions. A checkout line manager in Cy1 stated:

'If [an employee] complains to the HR manager about anything, the blame is put on us, implying that we handled that wrong' (LM4.CY1)

Thus, line managers were not only afraid of performing poorly but were also anxious that they would be the first person that the senior managers would place blame on should grievances be raised. Consequently, in order to avoid being used as scapegoats, line managers in both cases preferred to utilize the scale of authority within the organizations as their safety net. A line manager in Cy1/ Store2 stated, although reporting to the store manager was a common practice in this store and was demanded by the store manager, it also protected her, as she was not the only one who had to take responsibility for any mistakes. Similarly, in Cy2, line managers commented that the direct reporting and the direct surveillance by the HR manager kept them 'safe'.

Finally, the absence of a formal attendance policy was another explanation why the HR managers pursued the direct control of and wanted active involvement in the management

of absence, while it also explained the line managers' fear of taking on any responsibilities and carrying out their tasks without the guidance and approval of their superiors.

7.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored the management of absence within the four case studies across the two countries and provided an extensive discussion on the role of line managers within this process. Data revealed the drop in absence and the increase of 'presenteeism' in all cases. Although the current economic climate and the recession was a driver for this behaviour, a closer look at the data suggested that the way attendance was managed across the organizations was also a driver for the drop in absence. However, evidence revealed different approaches between the two countries. Specifically, in the UK the absence policy and the essential role of line managers within this policy generated feelings of insecurity and fear among employees, discouraging them from being absent. In addition, the new flexibility approach taken by the UK organizations was one of the crucial factors that contributed to the reduction in levels of absence, as employees had alternative options to stay off work rather than calling in absent, whilst line managers adopted an accommodative approach to attendance management. It is important to recognize the essential and versatile role of line managers within these two approaches and their essential role in employees' decision to attend work or not. The chapter showed that the line managers fulfilled a versatile role in the attendance management process, which influenced the employees' decision to attend work and the emergence of consent. Finally, the limited authority of line managers and the direct control over their role by the top management should not be neglected. Yet, surprisingly line managers in these two UK organizations have developed coping strategies towards the repetitive and time-consuming absence policy.

The role of line managers in Cyprus was also well evidenced as the catalyst for employees' attendance at work. The data revealed the absence of a formal attendance policy in both organizations, with other tactics being used to manage attendance, such as the intolerance by line managers towards absence, the pressure on employees to attend at work sick and the introduction of measures by the top management, such as the request for doctor's note, to ensure that absences are genuine. Although absence was not measured by any of the two organizations, data revealed a drop in absence. Two explanations for this were stressed in the chapter. Firstly, the economical explanation was described, with the impact of recession and the perception of absence as a source of fear and financial cost.

Nonetheless, the social explanation provided a wider view, explaining the reasons behind the drop in absence, and how the social relations, as well as the micro-politics within the groups influenced employees' attendance behaviour. The line managers' role was identified as the mechanism to control this behaviour, despite the discussion of their limited authority and the tight control imposed on them by the top management teams in the two organizations. Line managers adopted both an accommodative and a punitive approach to manage attendance, which, though, depended on the cliquey organization to negotiate the shop floor order. In other words, and as it is discussed later in this thesis, the cliques were a platform of consent making and generating compliance to regular attendance. Finally, line managers themselves consented to having limited authority due to feelings of fear and scapegoating, and therefore always sought the approval of higher management before making decisions around the management of absence.

8. Contesting and negotiating workplace attendance

In the previous section, the thesis discussed the drop in absence in all the cases examined in this research, and suggested that the economic crisis, the absence management policies/practices, and the line managers' role in managing attendance, discouraged employees from going absent, and led to the emergence of 'presenteeism' with employees attending at work when sick. This signifies the employees' consent and compliance to attendance.

However, data illustrated a latent behaviour by workers across the four organizations. Although employees in all cases attended work regularly, strong evidence across both countries showed that employees 'played games' and utilized silent and individual actions to contest attendance. Data revealed that employees utilized actions that the line managers rarely confronted and hence did not jeopardize their employment status. In particular, the manipulation of working time, lower levels of identification and emotional investment in the job were the most common tactics utilized by workers in all cases. At the same time, though consent was also an emerging behaviour. Employees were found to cooperate with their direct managers and, for example, been persuaded to work overtime and cover extra shifts. This section describes the contestation over workplace attendance by employees in both countries, suggesting that working time was still a contested issue on the grocery retail shop floor. It also explores the dimensions of consent making and the organization of consent in all the case study organizations.

8.1 The UK experience

8.1.1 Rebels of the clock

Findings revealed that employees attended work regularly, and this was driven by the dynamic forces described in the previous chapter. However, closer scrutiny of the available data revealed actions of working time manipulation. Participants, in both UK cases, argued that such actions were commonplace and part of the day-to-day reality of the organizations. Employees used practices such as taking longer tea breaks, lateness, avoiding work tasks and lower productivity in order to express their discontent with the working regime. Nevertheless, data revealed the line managers' role in controlling, as well as tolerating such behaviours and, therefore, generating willing consent within the shop floor social relations.

8.1.1.1 Longer Breaks

In both cases, employees were allowed a 30-minute break during their shift, whilst they had the option to choose how they took their break. The majority divided it into two 15-

minute tea breaks, while people often abused that time by taking extra minutes off the shop floor. This finding was more prevalent in UK2 but not completely absent from UK1. One employee in UK1 commented that people were often taking extra and longer tea breaks, while an employee in UK2 commented that employees used to take tea breaks that lasted up to one hour. The latter participant related that behaviour in individuals' attitude to their job saying that: '*they just can't be bothered*'. The majority of employees who took longer breaks were working in the shelves department. This suggests that it was easier for them to take long breaks due to the limited presence of the line manager on the shop floor, unlike to the checkout department. On the checkouts, the direct surveillance and the control through technology gave line managers greater control over tea breaks. In contrast, in the grocery department, where employees had more autonomy, the manager could not always monitor their return from the break due to the size of the store, the employees' freedom to move around the shop and the excessive number of customers in the shop. In fact, one employee suggested that line managers were tolerating such a behaviour. She stated:

'Nobody cares, people would fall asleep on their breaks, and no one would notice'. (E2.UK2).

Similarly, in UK1 the customer service desk operator suggested that employees in other departments were also taking longer breaks and often '*got away with it*' either because line managers tolerated this behaviour, or because they were too busy to monitor the break duration. The customer service employees, similar to the checkout operators, did not have the capacity to take longer breaks due to the direct surveillance by the front-end line managers and supervisors. This was in stark contrast to the employees who worked on the shelves, who had higher levels of autonomy in their job and were not directly monitored by their superiors. This shows that the two former groups of employees (checkout/customer service) had no space to utilize this action, due to the direct control of tea breaks in these departments. Understandably, these employees consented to the managerial control by the line managers, whilst taking a longer break was a game that they could not play.

Nevertheless, attempts to control the tea breaks of employees on the shelves were also evident. Although there were no available evidence in UK1 to suggest that the organization attempted to control this behaviour, in UK2 participants argued that cameras were installed at the bottom of the stairs to monitor tea breaks and check whether employees were taking longer breaks. In addition, the attitude of the organization to this

behaviour had changed as individuals would be disciplined if they took longer breaks, as Employee 1/UK2 commented, whilst before nobody was monitoring the breaks. It can therefore be argued that line managers' inability to monitor breaks in this department and to some degree their tolerance towards longer breaks, gave employees the opportunity to be absent from the shop floor while still being present at work. Yet, as the data showed, this behaviour was currently changing in both organizations with fewer individuals taking longer breaks, which was the result of tighter managerial control. Overall, longer breaks was a changing behaviour across the shop floor of both organizations, as the management imposed controls to tackle it, whereas employees consented to the new means of control and stop sitting on long breaks.

8.1.1.2 Lateness

Line managers were also found to be tolerant of lateness, which was another action used by employees. One employee in UK2 suggested that lateness was a common behaviour in the store and attributed the emergence of this behaviour to the size of the store and the number of employees who worked in the grocery department, as it did not allow managers to keep track on lateness. In fact, the particular store was a mega-store with more than 600 employees working on the shop floor, with only one line manager present in each department, who was responsible for a large number of employees. The same participant also compared the store that she worked in at the time of the interview with her previous store, arguing that in the latter store people were often late, as managers were tolerant of lateness and did not notice it on time. Evidence showed that in both organizations, there was an absence of a formal policy to handle lateness and despite the usage of clock-cards, no one had ever been disciplined for this behaviour. As a shop floor employee in UK1 suggested:

Say you do four shifts in a week if you come in late on two out of four every week then it will be brought up. And I've been brought up before for being late but I've never been disciplined or anything. [they just say] "you need to stop being late" (E2.UK1).

Nonetheless, in UK2, in a similar approach to that taken on longer breaks, the top management within the store had changed their attitude towards lateness and dismissed the grocery line managers who were tolerant of employees' lateness. In UK2, lateness seemed to be more of an issue for the organization in contrast to UK1, where participants did not report lateness as a common occurrence. Employees in UK2 utilized lateness regularly, as

the organization did not deal with lateness on a daily basis. Even so, it is important to stress that this behaviour was commonly found on departments other than the checkouts and particularly in the grocery department. A possible explanation for this might be that the checkout managers were less tolerant with such behaviours due to the intensive work organization on the front-line, and the close monitoring through technology. Another explanation for this was that managers had the ability to monitor 'working time' and 'time wasting' behaviours due to the limited mobility of employees on the front-end area, which was not the case in the aisle area.

What is interesting in this data was that participants pointed to the younger employees as those who were regularly late for their shifts. Participants discussed the working ethos of older employees, arguing that they would always inform the store whether they would be late, whilst they argued that the younger ones were not consistent. Therefore, lateness was mainly utilized by younger workers and as one of them admitted this was related to younger employees view on the food retail job as temporary part-time work.

I'm guilty at that sometimes [lateness]...this is my job but it is a part-time job and that's a different way I view it, whereas for someone that this is a full-time job might view it differently and would be less likely to be late. (E1.UK2)

Lateness was a behaviour used by employees in both the UK organizations. However, similar to the longer breaks, the data revealed a variation in the utilization of this action between departments. In the checkout department, across both cases, the direct surveillance of attendance by the line manager and the team/section leaders, forbidden the use of lateness, showing the consent by checkout operators to attend on time and being punctual. In contrast, the busy schedule of the line managers allowed employees in the aisles to attend late, which could be perceived as an expression of discontent. Additionally, participants suggested that some managers were tolerating this behaviour and in this way generated co-operation within the shop floor relations.

8.1.1.3 Wasting-time

Employees often avoided the job process and provided lower productivity and lower standards of work. One of the HR Managers in UK2 argued that some individuals '*are not interested in doing a great job*' and did not work to the best of their ability. A similar view emerged in UK1 with employees arguing that some of their colleagues showed limited interest in their jobs and often tried to avoid the tasks allotted to them. For example, an

employee from the clothing department in UK1 argued: “*other people just walk about with their hands in their pockets...and walk about all day and do nothing, nothing seriously*”. This was also evident in UK2 with one employee in the grocery department stating that:

‘I think everyone is getting that sometimes, just walking about and waiting for something to happen and not doing their job and just being bored. That is always gonna happen in UK2 [name of the organization] (E2.UK2)’.

Overall, there was a general view across the two shop floors that employees worked ‘*on their lesser standard*’, and this was a common practice on the shop floor in both cases, through which the individuals were expressing their discontent with the intensification of work and the close surveillance by managers. The data provided confirmatory evidence that the close surveillance by managers influenced employees’ behaviour and their actions. This was particularly evident in UK2 where employees argued that it was more relaxing when managers were not around the shop floor.

‘You say to your colleague “where is Craig [line manager]? He is upstairs”. [It] almost feels like a weight lifted off you, you just feel like “Aw OK cool. Let’s chill, let’s not do our work or let’s do our work but let’s relax” (E1.UK2)

Employees felt more autonomous when the manager was not present and suggested more space for them to avoid the job process. It should be noted, however, that the relationship with the manager was the main source of tension leading to actions such as avoiding tasks. Participants argued that when their relationship with their line manager was not ‘good’ they were more inclined to work to a lower standard, referring to the quality of tasks carried out and to the avoidance of the job process. One shop floor employee in UK2 commented:

‘If you have a bad manager, I suppose you don't really want to work as hard to make them happy’ (E9.UK2)

The process of ‘time wasting’ was not as much of an issue when managers were present. Employees stated that there was definitely more drive to do things when their manager or any manager was around, simply because they would not allow them to ‘*just to sit and chat*’. There was more pressure when managers were present on the shop floor with employees losing their ‘power’ and ‘autonomy’ to ‘rebel’ against the job process and, therefore, consented to the direct surveillance by the line manager. This was particularly obvious through the comparison of the three shifts within the organizations: the day shift,

the back shift, and the night shift. Employees who usually worked on a backshift or night shift argued that it was easier for them to avoid tasks because of the limited number of managers present in the store. Only three managers worked the backshift and only one manager was responsible for the night shift. In contrast, all managers were present on the shop floor during the day shift. Thus, employees had fewer opportunities to waste time during their shift:

‘On dayshift there are more managers in...so you can't really walk about with your hands in your pockets and if you do you are more likely to get caught (E1.UK2).

Yet, a closer look at the findings showed that the busy schedule of managers and the increased responsibilities within their role resulted in managers being away from the shop floor. Shop floor employees in both cases argued that they usually saw their manager twice in a five-hour shift, as these managers were usually busy doing administrative work in the office, such as preparing rotas or carrying out paperwork. This showed that the busy schedule of the managers gave employees the opportunity to avoid work and therefore control their own time and presence on the shop floor. Yet one employee who was working on the backshift stated that in the dayshift managers were usually around the shop floor for the whole shift. Therefore, for employees who worked on the dayshift, time wasting was less common due to the presence of the line managers and the direct surveillance of employees.

The participants in both cases pointed the younger employees, and particularly students, as those who often struggled with the work process and often employed different methods to avoid tasks. Respondents argued that students did not put any effort into their job and they often had the attitude of *"I don't care/so what?"*(E6.UK1). Likewise, a number of older participants suggested that the youngsters were lazy and they were attending the job just to get the money. One of the older employees in UK1 interestingly commented:

‘They are just here to take the money...They see the store as a fun fair...they just say, Oh it's like a playground, you come here you talk to each other’ (E8.UK2).

This evidence verified the argument that employees, and especially younger employees, were expressing their discontent towards the nature of work and to an extent towards their immediate manager, by attending work but not necessarily putting the required effort into the job process. They were avoiding their tasks, leaving tasks uncompleted, which were

consequently handed on the next shift, and/or completed their tasks to a lower standard. Some of the most common practices used were chatting with their colleagues, working at a slower pace and walking around the aisles in an attempt to avoid their job tasks. Yet, this was conditioned depending whether their direct manager or even other managers were present on the shop floor. In line to the discussion earlier, the line manager's presence on the shop floor influenced the utilization of 'time-wasting' actions, with employees feeling more autonomous to use these when the manager was not present, while, in contrast, they consented to the direct surveillance by the line manager when the latter was on the shop floor.

Unsurprisingly, though, the checkout operators were not in a position to avoid any tasks or the job process, again because of the close surveillance by supervisors, as well as the control of their daily performance through the checkout IT system. However, these employees employed other tactics to express their struggle over workplace attendance and the intensification of the checkout job. For example, one of tactics used on the checkouts in UK1 was employee's refusal to sit on particular tills. This strategy can be explained as a tactic to avoid the intensive work on the checkouts. To be more specific, the store had 25 tills, excluding the self-scan areas. However, the tills which were located closer to the exit (Till number 21 and 22) were the busiest on the shop floor, as the customers tended to walk through those tills instead of those located away from the main exit. One participant employee explained:

'if their car is parked at that end they don't want to walk up and down, they want to go through this till here (E7.UK1)'

This participant described her refusal to sit on those tills on a regular basis. This was related to the repetitiveness of the job and the excessive amount of customers queuing on these areas waiting to be served. Hence, the nature of checkout job was further intensified on particular sites of the shop floor where employees refused to work. The employee stated:

'I don't mind hard work but I came off that 21 till last Friday and I practically crawled home because it is the most busy till in the shop. It is right next to the exit and self-scan...every time you look up there is someone there. If you want to drink a wee cup of water or sneeze or anything you can't because it is constant, constant, constant..."oh 21 again"... My friend Alice who was behind me [till 22], actually pretended to be sick and I said to her I'm not going back there after

my break. So when I came in the next day the manager went "17 for you today Gillian, I'm not putting you on 21", and I said, That's good cause I wasn't going to 21.' (E7.UK1)

Paradoxically, the same employee, similarly to participants in UK2, refused to sit on the basket checkout as well. On this till, the customer was allowed up to ten items and it was a fast service site. However, employees argued that the basket till was boring and this was explained through the amount of 'dead time' spent on this area as customers did not tend to use this till.

It is therefore understandable that employees used the working area they were allocated to as another way to express their discontent over working time. Participants discussed the intensive nature of the job on specific tills- those that were preferred by customers. This is somewhat contradicted by participants who discussed feelings of boredom and expressed that shifts felt much longer when working on less busy tills. Therefore, by refusing to sit on these areas on a regular basis, checkout operators attempted to control their working time and the tasks they carried out on the day, as they avoided intensive shifts on busy areas and they also avoided the perception of long shifts on the quiet and 'so-called' boring sites on the front-end.

Finally, and unlike shop floor workers, despite the fact that checkout operators in both cases could not avoid any tasks in their job process, the research revealed that they expressed their struggle through refusing to do extra tasks. Often these employees were asked to carry out extra tasks such as collecting the baskets, returning items to the shelves and the frozen food area, as well as returning damages to the warehouse. Undeniably, this evidenced the intensification of the front-line job. However, employees often refused these extra jobs. As one of the section leaders in UK2 argued, *'there's lot of people saying no, they don't wanna do it'*. This was an expression of discontent found in both case studies with employees controlling the tasks they were carrying out within their working time.

One line manager in UK1 argued that there were some tasks that needed to be done and *'there is no way for these not to be done'* because of the pressure the manager received from the top management team. He argued that: *'You get people that moan but at the end are like "I'll do it" but they are not very happy on doing it'*, which of course shows the consent of employees within this process. Yet the role of the line manager was the one that influenced employees' decision to carry out any extra tasks. A senior manager (UK1) suggested that the business relied on emotional loyalty. Hence, it is argued that the

relationship with the manager affected employees' actions on the front-line. Clearly, the (informal) co-operation with the manager is the way consent is built within the shop floor relations. The negotiation between the line managers and the employees regarding daily tasks, or even allocation to shop floor sites, was evident in the data. Therefore, along with practices of time wasting, as an expression of discontent to the intensified and monotonous job, employees were involved in informal negotiations with their immediate manager, consenting to the shop floor regime.

8.1.1.4 Avoiding overtime

The managers' requests for discretionary effort from their team to take overtime and cover extra shifts was one more source that gave to employees the capacity to express, in a silent way, their contestation to nature of the food retail job and to the individual manager, as it is discussed in this section. Nevertheless, consent to overtime work was again an emerging behaviour in both organizations. Line managers were seeking for cooperation and built consent to workplace attendance, to the organization of the working time, and to overtime work.

Overtime was a common practice in both case studies that was used to cover absences as they occurred. The managers discussed that even though absences did not always need to be covered, usually, and especially on busy days, employees were asked to stay longer to cover the shift. In addition, managers called individuals to come in on short notice or to attend work later than their contracted hours in order to cover their absent colleagues.

Evidence suggested that individuals in both the UK cases generally wanted the overtime, as it was extra money to their monthly salary. This evidence was corroborated by managers in both cases who stated that employees were willing to do overtime for extra money.

However, it was found that older employees generally refused to take any overtime. Participants in both organizations argued that older employees usually did not take overtime or extra shifts, whereas the youngsters were those who were usually looking for overtime. Hence, in both organizations there was a distinction between older and younger employees in terms of those who were more likely to take overtime, with the latter group willing to take overtime for extra money, while the former group was found to be more reluctant to work any extra hours due to responsibilities outside of work, such as family and child caring responsibilities. Younger employees, however, often refused to take

overtime during weekends because they had planned nights out. Therefore, it can be argued that social life outside of work influenced employees' decision to take on overtime when requested by their manager.

Evidence suggests that the decision to accept overtime was manifested as both a tactic of emotional loyalty to the individual manager, or as a tactic to express the tensions between the employee and their line manager. Data demonstrated the struggle for managers to cover crucial shifts via overtime, such as peak times and busy periods such as Christmas. As a line manager in UK2 said, *'If it's a crucial shift we need to cover, then we cover it through overtime'*. Employees recognized how important it was for managers to cover those working hours in order to meet the targets, and they expressed their struggle through denying taking any overtime for their manager. Thus, looking at the bigger picture, in both case studies, the decision to work extra hours was a complicated phenomenon. One HR Manager in UK2 recognized the reluctance of employees to do overtime, whereas the HR Manager in UK1 attributed this to the relationship between the employee and their line manager, stressing that this relationship was a fundamental aspect of the social site of work and the employees' behaviour.

“If you have no trust in your manager they are not going to do the right thing, their behaviour will be driven underground and then...you stop working overtime for your manager, you don't perform as hard as you usually do, you don't do those little favours that we need to do to keep the business running” (HRM.UK1)

Indeed, research supported this argument with employees in both cases suggesting that for a bad manager they were less keen to take any overtime and to help them cover the absences. As one employee in UK2 stated:

‘It happened in the department, there were a few people off and he was like "I need you to cover that up" and people were like "I'm not doing it for him"’.

What was evident was that the line managers' management style influenced employees' decision to take overtime and impacted how hard they would work for them or go out their way to help them. Another employee in UK1 stated:

“She wanted me to start at half six in the morning and I said, “No! I'm starting at 8am”...If it was somebody I liked, I would have come in, I don't stay so far away anyway...for somebody decent I would have done that favour, no questions asked” (E14.UK1).

The employees were keen to do overtime for the managers they liked and the managers who were supportive and understood their personal circumstances. However, it was found that managers attempted to secure overtime through emotional loyalty and the provision of support to individuals, utilizing the flexible options. Data revealed that often managers accommodated individuals' needs through the flexible leave options, but would ask them for 'a favour back'. In other words, the support by line managers was offered with the expectation that this would be 'paid back'. The employees, in both organizations, also suggested that this worked as a two-way exchange. This is related to the argument that when the manager was supportive the employee would return the favour:

"It's give and take, in businesswise it is give and take. It's a favour paid back, they help me, and I help them" (E8.UK2)

This 'give and take' relationship on the shop floor, across the two organizations, shows how the managers were building consent to overtime work. This ongoing negotiation for extra working hours took place within a climate a cooperative and accommodative approach to workplace attendance. The example of older employees, who, usually, did not take overtime, clarifies this argument. The data in UK1 showed that older employees took overtime for the new checkout line manager who was described as supportive and fair. In fact, this manager recalled her surprise during Christmas 2012 when the older employees agreed to do overtime. This manager, who progressed from the checkouts, argued that this group of employees never agreed to take on extra hours before. However, they argued that this was a personal favour to her. The fact that she was supportive to them was the main reason that they agreed to take overtime. A similar view was expressed by one of these employees in UK2 who argued that although she did not do overtime, she took extra time as a favour to her managers because they were good to her. She stated:

'It is not the money...it's that they are good with me, so I feel I should pay a favour back and that's it' (E6.UK2).

Understandably, in the two organizations, the manager's attitude and their approach in accommodating, or not, employees' circumstances was a source of cooperation and consent or, respectively, a source of tension between the two sides, with employees refusing to work overtime for non-flexible and non-accommodative managers .

Saying that, refusing to work extra hours was the most common and usually utilized tactic by employees. Here it should be noted that this tactic was used more as an expression of

discontent towards individual managers who were not flexible to negotiate on attendance. Employees passed the pressure to the managers' shoulders through refusing extra working hours, whilst this showed that employees held the power to refuse overtime and control their working time. Yet, this was only applicable for full-time and part-time employees. The organizations, and specifically UK1, had introduced mechanisms to secure overtime and cover crucial shifts. This regards the introduction of flexi-contracts, for whom it is mandatory to take overtime, as it was discussed earlier in this thesis. Therefore, the 'flexi-contracts' was the mechanism to coerce overtime work for employees that were contracted under this scheme. Although the negotiation on overtime work between the line managers and these employees was not absent, the former imposed overtime work to 'flexi-contracted' employees, when they felt the pressure to cover crucial shifts, with the latter consenting to this regime.

To sum up, the employees indeed have used denials to take overtime as a way to 'get back to the individual manager', recognizing the pressure for the latter group to cover extra shifts in order to meet the targets. However, the employees' decision, in both cases, depended whether the line manager was accommodative to their individual circumstances, in which case the data revealed the agreement between the two for overtime work. Saying that though, it is important to recognize that in UK1, the management controlled overtime through the introduction of the flexi-contracts, which demonstrated the coercion of these employees to work overtime.

8.2 The Cyprus experience

8.2.1 Rebels of the clock

In the two Cyprus cases, employees utilized tactics to avoid the work process and expressed in this way their discontent towards the organization of work, the working time, and the leaner environment of food retailing. Although some similar tactics used in the UK cases were evident in the Cyprus data, across both organizations, employees devised even more sophisticated tactics to express their discontent. However, in these two cases, similar to the UK, the line managers' role shaped the shop floor dynamics. The negotiation of the shop floor order, and workplace attendance were evident in the data, while cooperation, coercion, and consent co-existed, along with contestation, in the shop floor relations.

8.2.1.1 Longer breaks

A common practice identified in the two organizations was the longer duration for tea breaks. Participants in both cases commented that often employees, especially employees with longer tenure in the organizations, were taking longer tea breaks. This was a daily phenomenon in all the stores examined. This was in contrast to the conduct of new employees who were more punctual, as highlighted one checkout line manager in Cy1. The same manager commented that older employees took advantage of their experience in the organization and used the fact that the manager knew that they could do the job properly. Older employees in Cy1 took longer breaks because, as was evident, line managers in this organization were tolerant of this behaviour from older employees, as they perceived it as 'returning the favour' for allocating extra tasks. Similar occasions emerged in Cy2. One younger part-time employee argued that employees with longer experience on the shop floor were always taking longer breaks and the manager would turn a blind eye, whereas when younger employees did that the manager would tell them off. Another employee in UK2 stressed the unfair tolerance towards longer breaks from older employees, and suggested that this happened because this group had developed a more friendly relationship with the line managers.

Data showed that younger employees in both organizations held a similar view, arguing that there was a different relationship between the line managers and the older employees on the front-end. This clearly leads back to the discussion on the development of cliques, particularly in Cy1/store2. The line managers' tolerance of longer breaks for older employees, who were members of their clique, resulted in feelings of unfairness on the front-end from younger employees, and gave older employees more space to control their working time. Understandably, in both organizations, the line managers were involved in a silent negotiation with older employees regarding their break duration. To explain more, the line managers tolerated longer breaks of employees, expecting them to 'walk the extra mile' for them. This negotiation took place within the cliquey organization of the shop floor. At the same time though, the line managers did not accept this behaviour by younger employees, who consented to this regime of negotiation. These findings show the conflicting approaches in managing working time on the shop floor, which depended on the shop floor informal social relations, such as cliques and negotiation of order.

Another explanation for this incident [longer breaks] was the perception of older employees of their managers. To be more specific, because line managers, in both

organizations, progressed from the shop floor, they discussed the difficulties in managing their ex-colleagues and current subordinates: *'When I first became a manager it was so difficult, they ignored me...that feels awful...you feel incompetent'*, commented a shop floor line manager in Cy2. Similarly, in Cy1, a checkout operator argued that older employees did not recognize the authority of the line managers. She stressed that they perceived them just one of their colleagues *because they had been working side by side for so long'*. This showed that the fact that line managers progressed from the shop floor, made them unable to manage their older subordinates, especially those that questioned their authority. Therefore, the managers preferred to silently negotiate with this group, rather than coercing the tea break regulations.

However, in both cases, interviews with line managers revealed attempts by the organizations to control this behaviour. The main device to control break duration was the clock card. In both organizations, employees had to stamp their clock card at the beginning and the end of their break. Both organizations kept records with the working hours and HR managers were monitoring the duration of the tea breaks. Yet, monitoring breaks was a new practice in Cy2. It was introduced in the store in the last two years and was particularly applied after the redundancies, whereas before stamping a clock card was not a requirement for tea breaks. One checkout operator in Cy2 stated: *'Now every minute is checked'*. Data showed that the organization put great emphasis in managing the duration of breaks to avoid any waste of working time. This was facilitated particularly through the line managers' role. Besides the clocking cards and the monitoring by the HR manager across all the departments, now line managers in Cy2 were also responsible for monitoring their subordinates' tea break. The checkout managers had a white-board where they noted the employees' names, the time and duration of their tea break. The manager was responsible for timing the break duration for each shift, and in the case of a longer break, they would flag that to the employee. Often that could lead to written warnings if the employee repeatedly exceeded their rightful break duration. The HR manager also commented that when an employee repeatedly violated the terms, and conditions, and did not comply with the organization regulations regarding the break duration, this could be a reason for dismissal. Yet, these control means were again subjected to the informal organization of the shop floor.

Nevertheless, employees in both cases, especially the younger ones, stressed feelings of insecurity regarding the break duration. Particularly in Cy1, they commented that they

could not sit on a longer break. This emerged through the managers' intolerance towards longer breaks in this organization. Evidence showed that both organizations adopted a strict practice towards longer breaks with written warnings and potential dismissals being the most common outcomes of this behaviour. Despite young employees' arguments that line managers were tolerant of longer breaks by older employees, line managers, in both cases, stressed that they did not tolerate any waste of working time, especially when the store was busy because this was a behaviour that affected them directly and they therefore monitored the tea break duration closely.

Overall, the findings revealed a complex picture regarding the utilization of breaks. On one hand, it is evident that the organizations attempted to formally control the tea breaks, through the clock cards and the direct surveillance by the line manager. In general, a stricter approach towards longer breaks was evident in both cases, which, indeed, discouraged employees to take longer breaks. On the other hand, though, the line managers adopted a tolerating approach to longer breaks, especially for those employees with longer experience on the shop floor. This was explained as part of the wider consent building approach in the two organizations and the attempts of line managers to gain the willing cooperation of the employees and as it is discussed later in the discussion of this thesis, this was articulated within the 'cliquey' organization of work, especially in Cy1.

8.2.1.2 Lateness

Another tactic that was practiced by employees to manipulate the working time was the late attendance at work. Lateness was also a common behaviour within the two cases, while managers discussed the increasing need to control it. The HR manager in Cy2 described lateness as a serious offence and an act of misconduct, whilst line managers suggested that monitoring attendance was one of their major responsibilities. Data in Cy2 showed that late attendance without prior notice to the line manager would automatically trigger the issue of a verbal warning, whilst written warnings were issued when the employee was systematically late and did not conform after a verbal warning. A similar approach was evident in Cy1 with one line manager suggesting that there is no excuse for lateness and supported the issue of warnings. Understandably, managers were intolerant of lateness, which was a reason for automatically triggering the disciplinary process. Although some participants, in both cases, suggested that line managers were flexible, and often tolerated lateness, data showed that this was only the case when the employee gave notice to the manager.

In both cases, issues with childcare, traffic jams, and long distance commutes to work were the most common reasons for lateness. However, line managers, and particularly those in Cy1, argued that these reasons were just excuses by the employees, arguing that employees that were systematically late were those who got bored of the job, fed up, and disliked their job. Nevertheless, as a checkout line manager in Cy1 argued, this behaviour was not as common now because of the economic crisis and the feelings of job insecurity. Data also suggested that the line managers' role in managing lateness was also a factor affecting employees' decision to attend late. For instance, a front-line employee in Cy1 described the aggressive attitude of her manager when people were late, suggesting that this discouraged her to attend late in order to avoid any confrontation.

Moreover, a similar practice found in the two organizations to manage lateness, was to cover the missing time. As two line managers, one in each organization, similarly argued, employees would be asked to cover the missing hour. For example, if they were late for ten minutes at the start of their shift, they would finish ten minutes late. Employees in each organization were asked to make up the time in different ways. In Cy2, for example, line managers asked employees to cover the missing minutes on the same day, whereas in Cy1 the line managers usually asked employees to work extra on a different day, depending on how busy the store was. For example, if the employee was late on a quiet day, the manager would ask them to work extra on a busy day and not on the day of lateness. Finally, data in Cy1 illustrated a different attitude by line managers towards individuals who were often late. As a checkout line manager commented, for individuals who were not punctual and were commonly late, there was a different and stricter approach. This was another factor that discouraged lateness and built consent. Employees discussed that managers would be less keen to accommodate their personal needs outside of work and would not be flexible to their requests if they were often late. Nevertheless, the formation of cliques within the shop floor was again a driver for employees to utilize lateness. Line managers in Cy1, in particular, were more tolerant of lateness from employees who were part of their clique, whilst they did not tolerate this behaviour from others. Employees were usually late when their clique leader was in duty because they knew they would escape the confrontation and the tight control by the line manager.

Overall, data showed that employees, in both cases, tried to express their discontent through the manipulation of working time, either through taking longer breaks or late attendance. However, as evidence showed the two organizations managed to control these

behaviours through authoritarian practices, leaving no room for the employees to utilize these tactics, while consent was an emerging behaviour. In the era of austerity, employees expressed feelings of insecurity and fear of sanction, whilst in both cases such practices often triggered disciplinary actions. Additionally, data revealed intolerance by line managers towards such behaviour and made them less flexible towards employees with a history of manipulating working time. These practices were therefore used to discourage employees from using such tactics, and generated coercion and consent.

Yet this varied, especially in Cy1, where the existence of cliques influenced the line managers' attitude on lateness for particular employees. Overall, the line managers' accommodative approach and/or (in)tolerance towards certain behaviours, in both organizations, was a factor that shaped the emergence of consent and coercion, whilst the space for employees to express their discontent through either longer breaks or lateness was shrinking. Yet, as more data showed, employees utilized more sophisticated tactics and played games to battle over the working time, such as attempting to leave their post and avoiding overtime, as it is described next.

8.2.1.3 Leave the till and 'time wasting'

Workers in the two organizations utilized three main practices to express their discontent with the organization of work. Although, in some cases these were described by participants as coping mechanisms to deal with the monotony and boredom of the job, data suggested that such actions were mainly used as an expression of discontent. Specifically, in Cy1, requests to use the toilet were very common during busy hours, and often employees in both organizations were leaving their post to carry out other tasks, such as picking baskets, to scale fresh grocery products, or return products to the shelves. Although the latter tasks were part of the job, evidence suggested that particular employees carried these out during busy hours, in an attempt to avoid the job process. Finally, another common incident of avoiding the job process was pretending to be busy in order to avoid extra tasks and customer service duties. Yet, these actions were still subjected to limitations, whilst the negotiation between the line managers and the employees, regarding the shop floor order was again evident in the data.

In more detail, a checkout supervisor in Cy2 argued that a common practice by checkout employees was to leave their till with the excuse of serving a customer. Yet, she continued that often they were *'just walking about in the aisles'*. Similarly, a line manager in this department argued that workers often left their post, and were found to chat with other

employees in the clothing department. Managers in Cy1 expressed a similar view, suggesting that some checkout employees were trying to avoid the job by leaving their till. Managers in both cases attempted to control this behaviour through common reprimands and reports to the store manager.

Nevertheless, LM5 in Cy1 argued that often she was, not able to confront this action as employees were using excuses such as going to the toilet or picking up the baskets to leave their till. Particularly, in this organization, participants discussed the common requests by particular individuals to use the toilet, when the front-end was busy. The financial line manager described the case of a particular checkout operator who was using the toilet at the same time every Saturday. The staff toilets were located on the first floor of the store, where the back offices were located, allowing this particular manager to observe this employee's habit of leaving the front-end when it was busy.

Employees in Cy1 spoke of a similar incident to the one just described where particular employees utilized a toilet break as an the excuse to leave their post. A checkout employee stated:

‘There is this girl who goes to the toilet every 30 minutes; she is the joke of the department (E6.Cy1)’.

This participant suggested that the employee she referred to was using this as an excuse to avoid the job and because she was working with the organization for many years, the line manager tolerated this behaviour. Therefore, as it was also described above, the line managers tolerated this behaviour especially for employees with whom they worked alongside for years, within the spectrum of consent building and cooperation.

Line managers in both stores of Cy1 acknowledged this behaviour by particular employees. Specifically, a checkout line manager in the head-store commented that this action was usually evident by Cypriot employees who would often leave the till on purpose, whilst Pontic-Greeks [immigrants] were scared of losing their job and therefore avoided such a tactic. She continued suggesting that three particular employees were asking to use the toilet because as she stated, ‘*they are bored to work and they use this excuse (LM4.Cy1)*’. All the checkout line managers in this organization expressed a similar view, commenting that employees were using a toilet break as an excuse to avoid the job. However, they commented they could not refuse such a request, despite the fact that they knew that some employees were shirking. They suggested that using the toilet is a human

need that could not be challenged. However, as more data has revealed, managers have tried to control this behaviour by refusing toilet requests when it was busy and asked the employees to wait until the customer queues were shorter, with line managers reprimanding checkout operators for using the toilet too often. Understandably, the line managers were responsible to control this behaviour as it influenced the shop floor order and the customer service. As the data showed, they negotiated the use of the toilet with the employees in order to have the less possible impact on the targets (queues) and the customer service.

It is important to recognize the differences in line managers' attitudes between the two stores in Cy1 towards this behaviour. Specifically, data revealed higher tolerance by checkout line managers in store2, while in the Head-store, due to the presence of the top management in the store, line managers were less tolerant of employees using the toilet during busy hours. Additionally, the employees in the Head store always asked for the line managers' permission to leave their till, unlike to store2. A checkout operator who worked in both stores described the differences between the two, suggesting that in store2 the situation was less controlled.

‘We were more free there [store2]. The girls were leaving their till anytime...I think it's the managers' fault, they are more laid back. In P [head-store], the managers are stricter. For example in my case, I asked my manager to go to the toilet and she said ‘No! Not now, we have customers’. If I was in KP [store2], I would go ‘ermm I'm going to the toilet, OK that's fine’. You know they kind of encouraged you to do that’ (E1.Cy1)

Therefore, even though in both stores this behaviour was tolerated, the line managers in the head-store attempted to control this behaviour during busy hours because of the direct control and presence of the head managers in the store. This shows the different approaches of line managers in different stores in how they managed and negotiated employees presence on the front-end.

However, employees in Cy1 utilized more actions to leave their till without coming into any direct confrontation with line managers. The most common action was to collect the baskets across the front-end. Although, the basket collection was part of their responsibilities, evidence showed that often employees would leave their till on busy hours to carry out this task, in order to avoid the intensive job of serving customers. This was

particularly evident on Fridays and Saturdays when the stores were busy and when customers were queuing to be served. A checkout operator stated:

‘When I first started here, I noticed the issue with the baskets... [we have to] collect the baskets, and put them back on the entrance. However, [some are] only doing that when it is busy. They do that on purpose to avoid the job. They know when to do it. I’ve seen them doing it when we were busy. They leave the till and collect the baskets. The customers were in long queues and she was picking up the baskets in order to avoid the checkout [job] because this is the most busy and difficult hour for us. That’s when you have all those customers waiting to be served (E8.Cy1)

Clearly, this quote shows that employees chose when to carry out this task in order to avoid the busy front-end, whilst they often avoided collecting the baskets on quieter days. This participant (E8) suggested that older employees and employees with longer experience on the shop floor expressed this behaviour more often than the younger ones. Therefore, it seems fair to suggest that this was a tactic utilized by particular employees in an attempt to avoid the checkout job by ‘pretending to be busy’. Besides as one checkout operator stated:

‘When they see a customer with a ‘big’ [full] trolley they say they are going to collect the baskets. If the customer did not put their shopping on the belt they ask them to go to a different checkout and they put the sign closed on their till and get off the till to pick up the baskets’ (E11.Cy1)

Checkout operators in this company implemented a similar practice to avoid customers with full trolleys. In fact, data revealed that some employees were closing their till in order to avoid serving customers with many products, or even customers that had verbally abused them in the past. To explain more, employees showed customers that the till was available by using a metal sign, which was placed on the till. This sign was signifying on one side ‘*next customer*’ and on the other side ‘*till closed*’. Participant managers commented that some employees often would turn the sign on the ‘till closed’ side in order to ‘*steal a few minutes from the shift*’. A checkout line manager in store2 argued that a particular individual was practicing that when she was close to finishing her shift, whilst others put the closed sign up when they saw full trolleys and switched the sign when they saw smaller baskets. Similarly, in the head store the financial line manager acknowledged an identical situation with two checkout employees displaying their closed signs when the

store was busy. She argued that they were practicing this on particular hours, and argued that this was the line managers' fault, suggesting that they tolerated this actions by older employees because they did not want any confrontation with their staff. Understandably, the line managers tolerated shirking on the front-end to avoid tensions within the employment relationship. Within this consent-making environment, the employees gained space to battle attendance and avoid job tasks.

The line managers commented that they were familiar with these cases and they suggested that the employees were closing their tills because they were bored of working. One of them stated:

‘When she sees the customer approaching, she turns it to closed, and she bends down pretending she is cleaning or tidying the bags. The customer then goes to the next till and she is watching through the till, when the customer steps away she sits back and re-opens the till...There is one employee who does that very often. When I see that I ask her why she closed the till, I call the customer back, and I ask her to serve the customer. I reported that before to the store manager. We have a few employees who do that. On the next occasion, they’ll leave [they will be dismissed] (LM4.Cy1)

Two main points can be extracted from this quote. Firstly, this tactic was utilized as an expression of silent discontent towards the nature of work and the intensification of the checkout job. Despite the fact that the managers were constantly present on the front-end, employees were still improvising with sophisticated ideas to express their struggle. Therefore, rather than leaving their till, either to use the toilet or collecting the baskets, checkout operators seemingly closed their till to the customer, pushing their direct managers' tolerance boundaries.

Yet, unlike the closure of the till, it should not be assumed that collecting the baskets was just an attempt to avoid the job. Although there is confirmatory evidence to suggest that, data has illustrated that participants described this tactic as a coping strategy towards the boredom and the monotony of the checkout job. As a checkout operator stated:

‘Sometimes you are bored and you stand up, you pick up some baskets (E13.Cy1)’.

Nevertheless, the majority of employees in Cy1, in agreement with the arguments stressed so far, argued that others were leaving their till when it was busy. For example, one employee in store2 commented that her colleagues were leaving their till between 12-1

when the store was busy, aiming to avoid work, and pretended to pick up the baskets in order to avoid serving customers. Hence, it is suggested that this tactic was a clear expression of discontent towards the intensive checkout job, especially in store2, and to a lesser degree a coping strategy.

Similarly, another checkout employee in this organization suggested that many of the older employees left their till to collect the baskets. This employee suggested that they would do that until the line manager, who was present on the front-end, would tell them off and would asked them to return to their till. Therefore, the line manager played a significant role on front-line employees' behaviour and the use of such tactics to avoid tasks of the job. Participants discussed that this behaviour varied depending which manager was on duty. They would not leave their till when a strict line manager was on duty, whilst this practice was more common when managers, who were more tolerant of it, were present. Similar to the arguments stressed above, the line managers' perception on what these actions mean, and their approach in managing them, built consent within the shop floor regime, on one hand, and generated coercion on the other hand. Additionally, the line managers' perception on these actions and the degree of tolerating them, constructed the space for employees to use these action to avoid work and express their discontent.

The formation of cliques on the front-end, in store2/Cy1 in particular, clearly influenced the utilization of such tactics. Data showed that in this store, managers were tolerating this behaviour depending on whether the employee was member of their clique. Therefore, depending on which manager was on duty, and whether the employees were members of their clique, they adjusted their behaviour, as they knew that their clique leader would tolerate it. Again, the clique was the platform where consent or discontent emerged, depending which 'clique leader' was on duty.

Conversely, in the head-store, although some data suggested the presence of cliques, it seemed that these did not influence the employment relationship and the employees' decision to avoid work. To explain more, when the checkout managers were present on the front-end, employees utilized this tactic to a lesser degree. Because the managers in this store were monitored directly by the Head managers, did not allow such behaviours, as they were feared of being reprimanded if doing so. Hence, the employees had less room to express their struggle and leave their till, and obviously consented to this store's regime.

In Cy2, there was no evidence for actions such as 'toilet use' or collecting the baskets. The participants on the front-end in Cy2 commented that they could not avoid work through

these tactics, as the managers were a constant presence around the department, which indicates the direct control on the front-end. This indicates the limited space for tensions to emerge, as well as and the building of consent and coercion in this organization. Employees in Cy2 discussed the authoritarian managerial style of the checkout managers, explaining this as the main driver for not been able to avoid the job process. As a part-time checkout operator argued, her line managers were strict, leaving less space for such actions to emerge, as employees could not leave their post in any circumstances. Therefore, the line manager's management style affected the employees' intentions to avoid work.

As more data showed though, the main driver for employees' decision in Cy2 not to utilize such actions, unlike in the past, was the current recession and the recent redundancies. In fact, feelings of insecurity were evidenced through the interviews with employees suggesting that they would not risk their position in an attempt to avoid the job. Particularly, a checkout employee argued that *'this is not happening now; I think it's because of the [economic] situation. They are afraid of losing their job'* (E15.Cy2). She implied that 'leaving the till' was a common tactic on the front-end in the past, and commented that when she started in the store the line managers tolerated such behaviours. In addition, the fact that fewer employees were present on the front-end in each shift resulted in higher exposure of employees' actions to the line manager. Hence, the closer monitoring of employees by the checkout managers was evident, while the external economic environment and the re-structuring within the organization were the drivers for the employees' consent, and consequently, the shop floor order.

8.2.1.3.1 Rebels away from the checkouts

A different situation was evident in other departments of Cy2, particularly in the food-section [shelves] and the frozen section. This data emerged mainly in Cy2, whereas no participants in Cy1 discussed any actions of avoiding the job away from the checkouts. This was not a surprise, however, as in Cy1, only a few employees had specific responsibilities away from the checkouts, whilst access to these departments was limited.

Interestingly in Cy2, it was found that because shop floor line managers were not present on the floor for the whole shift, employees had higher autonomy to carry out their tasks, and as a result differentiated the nature of the actions used. Not surprisingly, employees within these departments utilized different tactics to express their discontent, which were still related to 'time wasting'. To be more specific, participants in this organization argued that on many occasions employees who were working within the aisles were utilizing

actions such as ‘paper-shuffling’, adjusted their speed to a slower pace and avoided tasks and extra responsibilities.

Although the term ‘paper-shuffling’ would be more appropriate for use in an office situation, it is used here because it was more related to the administrative responsibilities of these employees. Specifically, employees were responsible for changing the prices and counting the number of items per product. These would be reported back to the line manager and the store manager through the filling out of a standardized form. Yet, participants suggested that often employees were ‘paper-shuffling’ and hence wasted their time by taking extra time to carry out this task. As one employee in the food department suggested:

‘I see lots of them pretending to be working. For example, they might hold their file, walking around and pretending to be counting products. We have this girl, she just stands there, and looking at the prices, going through her papers, and pretending she is thinking (E4.Cy2)

Evidence showed that employees within the aisles might have used speed as the main driver to rebel against the intensive and time measured job. Some employees suggested that they could not avoid their tasks because the manager would check the allocated tasks at the end of the shift and would flag any unfinished tasks. Yet, managers had a different view. In fact, shop floor line managers suggested that because they were absent from the shop floor, employees had room not to do their job properly. To explain more, the food line manager argued that as he was always away from the floor, because he had to be present at the warehouse, therefore, his subordinates found the opportunity to stop working and chat. He described a common incident when he stepped in the department and the employees were ‘just sitting there and chatted’, instead of stocking the products on the shelves. Similarly, the line manager in the frozen-food section stated:

‘They just sit there and chat. When they see the manager coming, they return to their job (LM3.Cy2)

Therefore, despite employees’ arguments that they could not avoid any tasks, interviews with managers clearly showed that ‘paper-shuffling’ and ‘chatting’, when the manager was not present, were the most common tactics employees used to rebel against the working time and attendance. Although one could argue that these could be coping strategies used to cope with the excessive number of tasks, data showed that this was more of an

expression of discontent towards the intensification of the job, especially after the redundancies in Cy2. This was clear through the example given by the food line manager who suggested that employees would never walk the extra mile for the manager and would try to avoid their job tasks in any way they could. He gave the example jam jars that were not stocked on the shelf according to head office guidelines, either because the employee was rushing the task or because a merchandizer stocking another product just pushed them away. Yet, the manager commented that the employees would tidy up the jars only when the manager highlighted the mistake. The manager also argued that they could not monitor every employee constantly due to the large size of the store and their multiple responsibilities. Therefore, this showed that the employees had enough manoeuvring space to utilize actions against their job and working time.

8.2.1.4 Avoiding overtime work

In both cases, employees discussed the autocratic style' of their direct manager as a source of tension. Employees, especially those on the front-end, have discussed the direct surveillance by line managers and their severe managerial style, with managers reprimanding employees while in the presence of customers, in an attempt to control the department, to ensure compliance with the organizational policies, and to secure a high quality of customer service.

Participants in both cases discussed the employees' turnover intentions because of this demeaning behaviour by the line managers but, as they suggested, the current economic situation and the rising unemployment was a determining factor to quit. Yet, as this research has found, employees have utilized alternative silent tactics to express their displeasure towards their managers demeaning behaviour.

Particularly, data showed that employees exhibited less emotional investment in their job because of the managerial attitude. Specifically, in both cases, employees' decision to utilize some of the tactics described in the two previous sections was based principally on their managers' attitude. For example, a checkout employee in Cy2 argued that the authoritarian style of her direct manager and aggressive behaviour was affecting her attitude towards the customer. She stated:

‘Her style is always blunt and arrogant...definitely I won't be in the mood to smile to the customer after that' (E6.Cy2).

Similarly, a checkout operator in Cy2 suggested that managers who were strict had a great impact on employees' psychology, driving them to be unpleasant to the customer. She also commented that when the manager was always telling the employees off they would constantly have a long face and that would influence the way they served the customer. Hence, the line managers' management style had a significant impact on employees' decision to follow the customer service policy, or to push it aside and express their discontent through this action.

Nevertheless, more tactics were utilised by employees to express their unhappiness with their direct manager. The most commonly utilized practice was to refuse to take overtime or cover extra shifts for the manager. Particularly, employees have suggested that they would refuse to take overtime for a manager who was bullying them or tried to enforce the extra work. This was recognized by line managers who suggested that not all the employees would accept overtime and usually employees with longer experience on the shop floor would take that extra time. Yet, as one line manager in the head office/Cy1 argued, employees usually refused to take extra time for her colleague [Helen] because she was autocratic and she tried to force them to work more than their contracted hours.

Indeed, employees in this store acknowledged the authoritarian style of Helen and compared her with LM4, who was described as supportive and as employees stated she always tried to accommodate their needs and never insulted an employee in front of the customer. Therefore, as employees commented, they were keener to take overtime for LM4 rather than for Helen. In all the stores examined, across the two companies, employees in all departments expressed a similar view. On the checkouts, where two or more line managers were responsible for this department, employees identified differences between the managers and discussed their preference towards the manager who was supportive and commented that they would not refuse to take overtime for them, which was not the case with the more strict managers. This demonstrates the way particular line managers built consent to overtime work, through an accommodative and flexible approach, whilst it also shows that the relationship between the employees and the line manager was still a contested one.

Employees also tried to avoid any interaction with particular line managers as a tactic to avoid confrontations and escape their direct surveillance. A checkout employee in Cy1/store2 admitted that she changed her shift many times in order to avoid working with a particular manager, expressing in this way her dissatisfaction towards the autocratic style

of this particular manager. This case was also evident in the Head store of Cy1, where the line manager who prepared the rotas acknowledged that many of the employees tried to change their shift in order not to be in the same shift with Helen, because of her autocratic attitude.

Finally, in this store one more tactic was found to be utilized by employees against this line manager (Helen). In fact, employees who were on the same shift with her, refused, or moaned about the extra tasks allocated to them by Helen. To be more specific, as the analysis of the work organization showed checkout employees had to carry out extra tasks such taking out the rubbish and bring bags and till roller-paper from the warehouse. As this manager suggested, she often came across oppositions from particular employees. She also argued she had to use her power and forced them to carry out this task. The manager commented that employees moaned and they did not speak to her for the rest of the shift. Employees in this store suggested that when Helen was on duty, some of their colleagues refused to carry out these tasks, whereas when LM4 was on duty they did not react and carried out the tasks. Therefore, although one could argue that employees' behaviour, reacting towards the extra tasks could be explained as a reaction towards the intensification of the checkout job, these data illustrated that it was more a tactic against the line manager's authoritarian approach.

These findings reveal two important conclusions. Firstly, the employees would express their discontent towards individual managers through various actions, such as refusing overtime, changing shifts, or not carrying out their tasks. Secondly, the decision to practice any of the latter actions was based on the line manager's attitude and style. For example, employees were keener to carry extra tasks or do over time for managers who were accommodative and were reluctant to do so for autocratic managers. Nevertheless, in the latter case, the autocratic managers flexed their muscles and coerced employees to carry out tasks and work overtime, even unwillingly, with the latter consenting to this regime. Understandably, accommodative and coercive attitudes, by the line managers, co-existed in the two organizations, with both approaches though leading to consent.

8.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored the manifestation of workplace attendance to express their discontent, and explored the dimensions of consent-making across the four case study organizations. The data suggested that despite the drop in absence, across all the organizations, as a result of the economic crisis, the management of absence and the role

of line managers within this process, employees had deployed other tactics to express their discontent towards the organization of work and played games within the labour process. Yet, attempts by the management teams in all cases to control these behaviours were not absent, while conflict, consent, coercion, and cooperation co-existed in the shop floor relations. It is important to emphasize the role of line managers within the shop floor relations, the negotiation of the shop floor order and the employees' decision to utilize such actions or to consent to the shop floor regime. The chapter has clearly showed that the line managers' role was the driver for the emergence of these behaviours, through either coercion or toleration of certain behaviours.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter outlines the contributions of this thesis, interprets the findings, and evaluates their implications in line with the existing theoretical frameworks. The chapter first discusses briefly the distinct contributions of this thesis, before discussing more explicitly the main themes of this research, which are the food retail lean regime and the work organization in the sector, the management, and the manifestation of attendance within the labour process, and the line managers' role within the process. The chapter next revisits the research objectives of this study, assesses the extent to which these have been met, and finally proposes areas of further research.

9.1 Contribution

This section articulates the conceptual and empirical contributions of this thesis to existing knowledge. The section firstly discusses the contributions emerging through the first objective and the examination of the dynamics within the nature of work. This is followed by identifying the contributions regarding the discussion on the triadic labour process model and attendance. Finally, it outlines the distinct contributions regarding the line managers' role in the management of attendance and the labour process.

The first contribution of this thesis regards the similar work organization in food retailing across the two countries. The available data and its interpretation confirmed existing discussions regarding the low pay, the part-time and the monotonous job within retailing, whereas the associated low-road employment strategies have also been documented in this thesis. This research shows that the organization of work is the outcome of a global trend [Wal-martization] and the lean regime, which impact on the nature and the organization of work within the sector. Unlike other researchers, who discuss food retail as homogeneous to the overall retail work this thesis has stressed a slightly different argument. Particularly, it is not denied that retail job has similarities to the supermarket job. However, this research has explained why work is organized within a low-road strategy, and suggested the Americanization of the supermarket employment as the outcome of the strong competitive pressures in the global food retail market and the pressures for lower costs. Therefore, in addition to labour researchers, who also have identified the characteristics of food retailing, this thesis has conceptualized and contextualized the work organization within a concept-specific framework, and showed that the sector's political economy generates similar dynamics across the two countries, which shape the work organization.

Understandably, within these two liberal economies, with similar IR systems, food retail job is also almost identical in its organization.

The second contribution emerged through the examination of the wider political economy in the two countries and regards the organization of the working time and the impact on the employment relationship. To be more specific, although research has well acknowledged the domination of part-time work within retailing, as well as food retailing, this thesis has revealed a new regime regarding the organization of working time, which is rooted in the concept of ‘forced availability’ and coercion. The data and its interpretation have shown that employers have stepped beyond the typical part-time job found in [food]retailing, and have developed new types of contracts, which generate pressures to employees to attend at work and work overtime. The new flexibility approach is a safety valve for the organizations to secure overtime work, to manage the customer flow in the store, and to provide high quality of customer service. In the UK this tactic was formalized through the terms and conditions, while in Cyprus this practice was implemented through the line managers’ role, negotiating with, as well as pressuring employees to work overtime. The era of austerity, in both countries, left employees vulnerable to their superiors’ impositions, whereas the employees discussed feelings of liability to work extra unwanted hours. Therefore, employees consented to this coercive regime. Theoretically speaking, the thesis shows that the working time and the ‘force availability’ tactics are becoming tools for employers to ensure the effective operation of the shop floor, and the shop floor order with minimum costs.

Nevertheless, the evidence reveals that the transformation of work and the organization of the working time are predicated upon the indeterminacy of the labour power. The classic theory of the labour process, discusses the double indeterminacy of labour power, and suggests that through this analysis we can understand the control-resistance dyad. Indeed, in this research the pressures on working time and the control of it by the employer are sources of tensions within the workplace. As this thesis showed, working time is a contested terrain, within which workers attempted to overcome the rigidities within the working time organization and the overall nature of work, through a silent expression of discontent. Nevertheless, following later waves in labour process research, this thesis contributes to discussions related to the triadic model of the labour process, suggesting that cooperation, coercion, and consent co-exist with contestation within the shop floor relations. The employees were indeed contesting the work organization, but at the same

time consented to shop floor regimes. Yet, differences were identified between the two counties. In the UK, both organizations formalized coercion, whilst in Cyprus, a constant negotiation was evident between the line managers and their staff.

The latter arguments lead to the third contribution of this thesis. This thesis examined the manifestation of attendance within the labour process, suggesting that absence as a form of resistance is regarded as muted, whilst consent emerges. The era of austerity and the way absence was managed across the four organizations discouraged employees to utilize absence as an expression of discontent, mainly due to feelings of job insecurity, on one hand, and feelings of liability on the other. Understandably, employees, in all cases, consented to the attendance management regime and were obliged to regularly attend. The organizations swung between two conflicting approaches to manage attendance. One on hand, by following the absence policies (UK) and practices (Cyprus), they generated fear for dismissal, whilst on the other hand, as it was distinctly found in this thesis, they focused more on preventing absence through an accommodative and flexible approach, rather than managing it, making employees liable to their managers to 'pay a favour back'. The latter approach is theoretically suggesting a new accommodative approach in attendance management, with employers recognizing the need for a shift in the attendance/absence culture on the shop floor. This accommodative approach generates the perception to employees that the organization supports their individual circumstances, and provides illusions of autonomy in the management of their own working time, as requests for time off were usually accepted by managers. This shows that the employers controlled the labour power and ensured attendance by generating feelings of liability to be paid back to the organization, utilizing the line managers' accommodative attitude as a tool to enforce attendance and to nurture consent.

The versatile role of line managers within attendance management is also a distinct contribution of this thesis. As this study suggests, line managers were involved in a conflicting role within this process. On one hand, they had to follow the formal policies and practices to coerce attendance, whilst, on the other hand, they were those who 'brought the accommodative approach into life' and, therefore, cultivated cooperation and willing consent to attendance. Again, in the UK, the organizations formalized the accommodation of the employees' circumstances through the formal flexibility policies, while in Cyprus it was to the line managers' discretion to adopt an accommodative attitude

to attendance. In both countries through, as it is discussed below, the flexibility approach was subjected to limitations and direct control from above.

However, conflict was not absent from the employment relationship. As the thesis found employees were utilizing more sophisticated tactics to express their discontent towards the work organization. This is a notion that this research calls *'Rebels of the clock'*. This new concept suggests that conflict is expressed in a silent, individual and spontaneous way. Employees were 'playing games' to appropriate working time and effort, in a way that did not bring them in a direct conflict with their line manager, and therefore did not jeopardize their employment status. This thesis adds to the ongoing debate regarding industrial conflict and suggests that this concept is still embedded in the employment relationship. However, in the era of austerity and high unemployment this is used more as a tactic to appropriate their working time and the actions within it, rather as a form to take control over the work organization and, of course, they avoided to exhibit themselves as troublemakers to the management.

Nevertheless, the expression of silent conflict was subject to the line managers' tolerance, as well as the negotiation between employees and their managers regarding the shop floor order. Indeed, across the two countries the role of the line manager was the catalyst for the employees' decision to 'play games'. The informal negotiation between the two was a critical process for the shop floor order. This was particularly the case in Cyprus, where the negotiation between the line manager and the employee was implemented within the cliquy organization of the shop floor. Therefore, the cliques and the informal organization of the shop floor was a platform of negotiation, regarding 'game playing', as well as attendance, whilst, at the same time, it was a dynamic of coercion, depending whether the employee was (or not) a member of the line managers' clique.

Finally, the thesis has extensively examined the role of line managers in managing attendance at work. These actors, in both countries, played a significant role within this process, which impacted on the employees' decision to attend work. Yet, what this study has shown is the vulnerable role of line managers in the rationalization of the employment relationship. This thesis suggests that the 'Wal-martization' trend, as the dynamic that influences the employment relationship and the organization of work in food retailing, is also the driver for squeezing the line managers' role in managing attendance. The centralized attendance process in the UK and the close monitoring of the line managers' actions by the top management in both countries, has suggested the degradation of line

managers' job, as they held limited discretion and authority within the process. Line managers were subjected to forces of bureaucratic and direct control and were vulnerable to the rationalization and control of attendance. They were solely responsible for the implementation of rules and procedures handed down by the top management, whilst the intensification of their role was also evident. Therefore, bringing two schools of thought together - industrial relations and HRM- this thesis comes to suggest that the line managers' involvement in HR, and in attendance management in particular, is restricted within formal policies and procedures, whereas the 'supervisory problem' is still present on the supermarket shop floor, with line managers standing between conflicting roles (formal and accommodative) and are subjected to direct and bureaucratic control.

Nevertheless, interestingly, the thesis shows that despite the impact of the 'Wal-Mart effect' on the line managers' role, these actors, in both countries, have developed tactics to protect themselves from the control from above, regarding their role in managing attendance, and avoided being stigmatized as poor performers. The manipulation of the formal policy in the UK and the utilization of micro-politics in Cyprus, are distinct findings of this research. Theoretically speaking, line managers 'played games' and developed regimes within which they were utilizing labour power to control the absence process, to ensure high attendance in their department, to meet the targets, and to exhibit compliance with the rules and procedures set by the top management, whether these were formal or informal. In other words, these actors developed informal tactics within their managerial role of managing attendance, to meet both the requirements of their job description and at the same time controlled their involvement within this process and the impact on their role, and found ways to, somehow, gain discretion within this process. The informality of the organization and negotiation of workplace attendance and the shop floor order were prevalent in the data and major contributions of this thesis.

9.2 Lean Retailing and the similar work organization in the UK and Cyprus

This section discusses the dynamics within the employment relationship in the food retail sector, which are driven by the 'Wal-martization' trend. It also discusses how work is organized in the food retail markets of the UK and Cyprus, and argues that this is an outcome of the intense competition and the employers' attempts for lower costs. Finally, it comes to a conclusion regarding the contested employment relationship in the two markets examined.

In both countries, the data showed the adoption of a low-road strategy by all the case study organizations and the leaner regime within food retailing. The ‘Wal-Martization’ trend is the dynamic that shaped the low-road strategy adopted by grocers in the two countries. The case study organizations of this research are part of a globalized market, which is characterized by high competition and pressures for lower costs. Although not all the case study organizations are multinational, for example Cyl, they are still part of a market in which the global competition and the global sectoral trends and dynamics have an impact on the ‘players’ in it. Therefore, similar to the wider service sector, low road strategies were adopted to strive against the domestic and global competition by reducing costs, and especially labour costs (Bernhardt, 1999; Bianchi and Swinney, 2004). In the UK, the price competition was significantly aggressive and, as it was somehow expected, the two case study organizations attempted to manage costs and particularly labour costs, as the Wal-Mart trend suggests (Lichtenstein, 2006a), to survive in the market. In Cyprus, the analysis revealed the changing dynamics within this market, such as the investments by international grocers in the country, and the deepening recession. These new market dynamics brought the management of cost to the forefront for the organizations. The increasing competition with international retailers, as well as the impact of the recession, forced the two case study organizations to take measures to reduce what they spent on labour and to develop a leaner regime. The reduction of labour cost and the leaner organization of work was a one-way solution for the two Cyprus organizations and the norm in the Cyprus economy, during the recession (Ioannou, 2014).

Clearly, the case study organizations in both countries had developed a lean working regime and espoused the Wal-Mart’s low road strategy, aiming for the lowest possible costs. This confirms Adams’s (2006, p.213) argument that ‘Wal-Mart has become the paradigmatic representation of a new age in the history of capitalism’, and agrees with Lichtenstein (2006a) who suggests that Wal-Mart is the face of the 21st century capitalism, as its employment practices are imitated by its competitors. Yet, the Americanization of service (Tilly, 2007) is not a trend found exclusively in food retailing, but it is a wider phenomenon in [interactive] service work, which is driven by the rules of ‘McDonalization’ and ‘Wal-Martization’. These arguments are not associated with the two particular corporations per se, but more with the patterns of employment that both organizations have developed and diffused across the service sector. Indeed, this research revealed a similar application of a low-road strategy in all the case study organizations, whilst it identified a similar organization of work across the two countries. In a nutshell,

the research has identified similar dynamics in the two countries, which impact on the organization of work. These dynamics emerge through the global trend of ‘Walmartization’, which drives the lean organization of work in food retailing.

Taylorist principles were applied by all the case study organizations to organize work, confirming the authors’ suggestion that food retailing is rooted in Taylorism (Basker, 2005; Lichtenstein and Johansson, 2011). Sophisticated technology, low wages, limited career perspectives, strict supervision, part-time and flexible employment schemes, and high levels of control, were endemic in the work organization across the two markets (Carré et al., 2010; Royle, 2010). Employees across all the case studies were under the direct control of their managers and were also subjects of technical and bureaucratic control (Edwards, 1979). Additionally, the analysis of the job process shows that in both countries this was a repetitive, monotonous, and intensive process, with employees being subjected to various types of control from both managers and customers (Leidner, 1993). This confirms Carls (2009) argument who describes work in retail as a ‘neo-Taylorist’ occupation, in which the routinization of work, the lack of decision-making by employees, and the direct supervision of workers are embedded characteristics of the job (Bratton et.al, 2007; Ben-Ner et al., 1999). The routinization of the food retail job was evident across the shop floor in all cases, whereas the employers benefitted through the lower labour costs and the increased managerial control. The power of the customer was evident in all organizations, as other research has also suggested (see Bélanger and Edwards, 2013b; Korczynski, 2013). Evidence in this study revealed the pressure that emerged through the interaction with the customer, especially in cases when the latter was demanding and difficult to handle. Incidences of customer bullying were a daily reality in the stores of all companies and often customers verbally abused employees, especially those on the front-end (Macdonald and Sirianni, 1996b). Nevertheless, in this research the customer fulfilled a double role within the work organization. On one hand, the customer’s demands shaped the organization of work, whilst on the other hand the customer was influential on the nature of work and employees’ views on their job. The customer either could generate feelings of pressure, stress, and frustration to the employees, or became the device to cope the routinized job. These findings reveal a double explanation. On one hand, the customers seemed to exercise control over the labour process, and informally monitoring the service workers, reinforcing the managerial control (Leidner, 1993), whilst, on the other hand, chatting with the customer was a mechanism to cope the monotonous job process.

In agreement to Rosen (2006, p.255), this research suggests that the culture of food retailing is a result of a “policy designed to save pennies”. As it was already argued above, the leaner organization of work was well evident in the data, showing that across the two countries the organizations were attempting to keep labour costs low. Sparks (1995, p.38) argues, “The objective of cost efficiency has created a demand for flexible part-time workforce”. The latter argument was not alien to this thesis. Indeed, the four case study organizations have organized work based on flexible employment schemes, enjoying the benefits on the wage budgets, as it is similarly found by Caroli et al. (2010).

O’Reilly (1994) (in Korczynski, 2002, p.74), following Atkinson and Meager’s (1986) categorization of flexibility, discussed two types of flexibility – numerical and functional flexibility. The former type of flexibility, as Korczynski (2002) discusses, refers to the adjustment of the workforce numbers in line with fluctuations in demand, whereas the latter refers to allocation of different tasks to the workforce in line with fluctuations in customer demand. Caroli et al (2010) develop a similar categorization of flexibility distinguishing it into external and internal. Research of flexibility is immense and flexibility, as a term, has many different meanings. Yet, in this case, and following the former authors’ categorization, it refers to the ability to react to changes (see Furåker et al., 2007, p.1–2), as well as to secure attendance, as it is discussed later. These flexibility schemes (numerical/functional) were evident in all the four case study organizations. However, although all companies, in both countries, adopted an identical functional flexibility, the numerical flexibility approach was found as somehow different between cases and countries. Nevertheless, both approaches generated tensions on the shop floor.

Regarding the functional flexibility, all companies have developed a multi-tasking strategy for shop floor employees to allow them to move quickly from one type of job to the other (Korczynski, 2002). Indeed, commonly, in all the cases of this research, most of the shop floor employees received checkout training, whereas checkout operators received training in other departments. The two UK organizations developed a formal policy that was related to this type of flexibility. The so-called ‘relief cashiers’ or ‘queue busters’ were used to assist checkouts. The aim of this scheme was to control the busy shop floor, to control the long queues, to meet the targets set by the Head Office, and, of course, to keep labour costs low. Similarly, in Cyprus, although this practice was not formally regulated by the Head office, in any of the two cases, this was a common practice found in the two organizations to cover the labour needs on the front-end. For example, in Cy2, the

functional flexibility aimed to tackle the glitches in the departments due to labour shortages, which was the result of the recent redundancies. Additionally, in both Cyprus cases, this type of flexibility was also used to cover the extra working hours that were generated by the new 'opening hours' regulations without the need to recruit new employees.

Therefore, similar to the literature, it is argued in this thesis that the functional flexibility approach was common in food retailing and vital to the service sector (Korczynski, 2002), whereas in conjunction with other research, this type of flexibility/multi-tasking is a practice found across the food supply chain (Caroli et al., 2010; Newsome, 2003). In fact, cross-training was introduced for employees across the shop floor to achieve greater flexibility and 'multi-skilling' within the area (Newsome, 2003), to reduce slack times, to lessen the repetitiveness of tasks, and to meet the business needs. However, although on this site of the supply chain – manufacturing – the flexibility was a result of the power dynamics between the supplier and the buyer/supermarkets, in this thesis the need for flexibility is an outcome of the competition and the attempts for lower cost and therefore the construction of a leaner organization of work. Finally, the functional flexibility was utilized in all the case study organizations as a mechanism to tackle the impact of absence on the business. Indeed, the data revealed the 'rotation' of employees across the shop floor to cover absences, a fact that suggests that the organizations utilized this type of flexibility as the a 'safety valve' to unplanned absence.

Regarding numerical flexibility, managers in all cases have discussed the domination of part-time work on the shop floor, whilst evidence revealed that the employment of females and young students on a part-time basis was core to the labour force structure in all companies. The comparative nature of this study revealed similar findings to other research, which suggests that food retailers rely heavily on part-time and internal numerical flexible working schemes to structure the shop floor workforce. For example, the volume edited by Baret et al. (2000a) brings together international comparative research regarding flexible working in food retailing. The authors in this book come to a similar conclusion with this thesis, suggesting the domination of part-time work in food retailing. For example, Freathy and Sparks (2000), who analyse the organization of time in the UK food retail sector, clearly demonstrate the part-time nature of the supermarket job and suggest that although this is a wider phenomenon in the country, food retailers are 'one of the most advanced employers of labour in terms of flexibility' (p.83). This research

comes to stress a similar argument suggesting that the two case study organizations in the UK were unquestionably utilizing flexible employment and part-time work as the core of their operational efficiency, enjoying the cost advantages of these schemes, whilst, as it is discussed later, in the Cyprus food retail market part time work was an emerging working scheme.

This thesis contribution to existing debates lays on the findings in UK1, which offers a distinct type of contract, the so-called 'flexi-contract', to achieve flexibility, to secure overtime work, as well as to drive cost down. This new working scheme was different from the typical part-time employment structure found in UK2 or in Cyprus. The deregulation of working time in the UK allowed the utilization of such working arrangements (Freathy and Sparks, 2000). In fact, the flexi-employees had their working hours extended based on the needs of the organization. They were asked at a short notice to work additional to their contracted working hours, in order to cover the needs on labour, to manage customer flows, as well as to cover absences. These contracts, similarly to zero-hour contracts, were used to cover last minute needs in labour, however, unlike the former, these 'flexi-time' employees had standard and minimum contracted hours, which were extended based on the needs of the organization. This type of contract is related to the type of flexibility that Korczynski (2002, p.74) calls '*labour-stretching*' [emphasis original]. Korczynski, quoting Zeithaml and Bitner (1996, p.399) notes that in many service organizations, as similarly found in this research, employees are asked to work longer in periods of high demand. The development of the flexi-contract in UK1 and the adoption of the 'labour-stretching' approach were driven by the pressure for lower labour costs, the declining union density, and the limited governmental regulation on working time (Negrey, 2012). Korczynski (2002) argues that the systematic utilization of 'labour-stretching' "may trigger a breakdown in the fragile social order of the service workplace" (p.74) and leads to actions of dissent and, of course, coercion for attendance. Indeed, this thesis has revealed the precariousness of the working time and suggests the contested nature of latter, whilst, at the same time, reveals the coercion to the managers' directions for attendance.

This precarious type of contract was the source of unpredictable schedules. Indeed, through this contract, labour was available to the manager anytime they needed extra bodies on the shop floor. Employees were not 'allowed' to refuse overtime often, even if they had a legitimate reason not to extend their contracted hours. Freathy and Sparks

(2000) comment on this type of contract, without though discussing its formality within the organization of working time, neither the impact on the employment relationship. They do discuss though that such arrangements took an ‘open book’ approach, within which every individual has to be available to take extra working time. Carls (2009) reports that in retailing, where, as it was similarly found in this study, part time work constitutes the predominant form of employment, the fulfilment of the organization’s flexibility requirements relies to a large extent on part timers’ readiness to accept overtime hours and shift changes not foreseen in their labour contracts. Nevertheless, in this study, this takes the form of “forced availability” (Carls, 2009, p.88). This goes beyond employees’ willingness to adjust their working hours and accept overtime hours. Rather, it goes to the level that the organization secured overtime and workplace attendance through the terms and conditions, forcing flexi-contracted workers to extend their shifts. This is highly precarious for the employment relationship as the widespread experience of “forced availability” among this group of employees, generated feelings of unfairness and pressure to establish availability to extend their hours. As Standing (1999, p.81) argues, when the organization calls employees to be flexible it usually means they are asked to make concessions. Indeed, although line managers in all cases were in a constant negotiation with employees to work overtime, UK1 secured overtime and workplace attendance through contractual obligations.

Yet, in UK1, as the data showed, tensions were evident on the shop floor with flexi-workers coming into conflict with the managerial regime as their personal interests clashed with the unpredictability of their working time (Henly and Lambert, 2014). Nevertheless, they consented to work overtime, unlike other employees who could adjust their behaviour to overtime work, based on the managers’ attitude. Yet, as it is discussed later in this chapter, and as it was shown in Chapter 8, a latent behaviour emerged within the employment relationship with employees, of all types of contracts, expressing their discontent in a more silent way. What it should be emphasized at this point, though, is that the ‘labour-stretching’ and the novel flexi-contract, were offering to the organization a framework within which managers could appropriate labour and working time based on the needs of the organization, without spending significant costs on additional recruitment. This was, of course, part of the leaning process of the work organization.

Part-time work was a new phenomenon in the Cyprus food retail market. The data revealed a shift in the organizations’ recruitment strategy, which was currently focusing

more on part-time employment, while they also changed full-timers to part-time contracts. Indeed, over the last decade, because of the increasing competition with international retailers, and the deepening of the recession, the players in this market, both domestic and international, turned into part-time working schemes to structure their labour force. Although the legislation seemed to be stricter in comparison to the UK, employers still enjoyed a reduction in labour costs through this tactic. The regulations in Cyprus are to some extent similar to the French case study in Baret (2000), as part-time work became, in both countries, a standard form for jobs involving direct customer contact, such as the checkouts. Nevertheless, although in Baret's (2000) research this was regulated and protected by collective agreements, in Cyprus employees still remained unprotected, and had limited voice on the shop floor, due to the absence of any formal organization in the sector. This confirms the argument that in different countries, different levels of union density are evident (Johansson and Coggins, 2002; Kolben, 2007; Tilly, 2006). In Cyprus, as European Research (EWCO⁴) showed, there is poor organisation in the sector, mainly because the young people working in food retailing consider this as a temporary job, whilst middle age [immigrant] women, who are the majority of the food retail workforce, would not risk their jobs by organising in unions. This should not be a surprise though. As Lynch et al. (2011) argue, part-timers often refuse to unionize, whereas trade unions are more keen to protect full-time employees' rights, and often neglect the part-time employees' pay equity (Kainer, 1998). Yet, as EWCO reports, in many cases in Cyprus employees have been threatened with dismissal in case they joined a Trade Union. Additionally, as Ioannou (2011; 2014) reports, after 2008 and with the recession deepening, the liberation of the Cyprus economy is evident, with labour regulations loosening. As the same author notes, and as it was evident in the two Cyprus case study organizations, the employers' immediate reaction to the recession was the reduction of the labour cost, which was achieved through redundancies, wage cuts, and changes in employment contractual arrangements. The latter arrangements, in particular, were new occurrences in the wider Cyprus economy, including the two case study organizations of this study. These included, as it was evidenced, the conversion of full-timers into part-timers and the increasing use of casual labour (Ioannou, 2014).

Cyprus retailers, similar to the UK retailers, followed the global norm in the sector and have turned into a more flexible structure of their labour force and a leaner organization of

⁴ European Working Conditions Observatory

work. The current recession, and the increasing unemployment in the island, generated feelings of insecurity and pressure for employees to consent with the management regulations and the calls for overtime work, whilst they had no protection by any formal bodies (Gallie, 2013).

The market liberation though was not spontaneous but it was driven by the state's intervention in an attempt to tackle macro-economic measures. When the country entered the recession, the unemployment, especially for young graduates, increased dramatically. European Statistics showed that in 2013 the youth unemployment in Cyprus jumped to 17.5%, and this was the highest increase in unemployment within the Eurozone. Therefore, employees had no choice but to accept lower wages, the reduction in their working hours, and consequently the reduction in their monthly income, whereas their voice was muted. As Gallie (2013) suggests, at times of economic crisis and rising unemployment, the employees' capacity to resist is heavily diminished as a result of fear of job loss. The formal legislation that was protecting this sector has been reviewed by the government, who attempted to reduce the increasing youth unemployment by enhancing part-time work in the sector through the extension of the store opening hours. To be more specific, before the introduction of the new opening hour regulations, the stores in tourist areas had different opening hours to other stores. The Cyprus government though extended the opening hours for every supermarket and retail store in any area, and encouraged employers to recruit part-time workers to cover these extra hours. However, new recruits were not evident in Cy2, whereas in Cy1 the recruitment was minimal. Therefore, employers put more pressure on employees who already worked with the organizations with the latter discussing the constant and the everyday working schedule. Clearly, this was practiced by the organizations to keep the labour costs low and at the same time to increase their financial efficiency through the higher sales that were expected to be the outcome of the extended opening hours.

Akehurst and Alexander (1995) discuss the extension of opening hours for retailers as a tactic to response to the changing socioeconomic environment and the consumer needs, suggesting the inevitable impact on the employees' quality of life through the adoption of new working practices such as part-time and temporary work. This impact was evident in this research. Although the extension of opening hours was not reflected to consumer needs *per se*, but it was more a macro-economic measure to tackle unemployment, it unquestionably generated feelings of pressure for existing employees and intensified their

work. The employers did not cover the extra hours with extra part-time workers, as the new regulations suggested, rather they increased the working hours of the employees that were already working with the organizations, often on a short notice or even no notice (Negrey, 2012; Penn and Wirth, 1993), a fact which resulted in the intensification of the supermarket job. As Ioannou (2014, p.121) concludes, ‘the current crisis has exacerbated the already existing processes of labour market deregulation, trade union decline and deterioration of employment relations’. Indeed, the Cyprus government gave to the employer the space to manoeuvre on how they would organize working time, leaving employees unable to react, at least formally, due to the uncertainty and the job insecurity found in the labour market. This should not be a surprise though. As Negrey (2012) notes, employers prefer to offer overtime rather than new hires to keep labour costs low, as they avoid expenses on training and extra benefits.

9.3 The structured antagonism: Conflict and consent

The discussion above illustrated the similar organization of work within the four case study organizations in the two countries. Although, the section above did not discuss all the elements of the food retail job in detail, it recognized the similarities [and slight differences] within the work organization and, again, acknowledged the ‘Wal-Mart effect’ as the dynamic that shapes the labour process.

This thesis suggests that the characteristics of the food retail job and the work organization are evidently sources of tensions within the employment relationship. As the data showed, the interests between employers and workers clash, with the former aiming to achieve surplus value, whereas the latter unavoidably resist. In this research, the employers in both countries attempted to maximize the surplus value through the re-configuration of the working time, the intensification, and mechanization of the labour process, and the constant reduction of labour costs, which was achieved through a strategy of lean retailing and the leaner work organization (Brown, 1992; Thompson, 1989). Understandably, the work organization is, as Edwards (1986) refers to it, a source of ‘structured antagonism’ between workers and employers.

Industrial conflict is, and it should be perceived as endemic to the capitalist employment relationship and inherent to organizational life (Courpasson et al., 2011; Mumby, 2005; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). Nevertheless, it should not be presumed that employees are always involved in a contested relationship with their superiors. As this study’s findings showed, and as it is discussed in more detail below, employees complied and

consented with the organisational directions. This thesis is interested in the triadic model of the labour process research and the links between the context and the contemporary discussions on the new model of control, resistance, and consent (Thompson and Newsome, 2004).

The latter is a central driver for this research. By avoiding repeating any of the above arguments, it should be noted that the relationship between capital and labour is inherently conflictual (Strangleman and Warren, 2008), with conflict and consent being endemic in the employment relationship (Courpasson et al., 2011; Jermier et al., 1994; Mumby, 2005; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). This research explored how structural conditions are interpreted in the continuing relationship between managers and workers (Edwards, 1990b, p.56), whilst as Kärreman and Alvesson (2009, p. 1115) note, “The answers to these questions in organizational analysis depend on the context”. Next, this chapter interprets the data of this study, illustrates the complexity of the shop floor relations, and explains how attendance is manifested within the labour process.

9.3.1 Workplace attendance: A labour process analysis

This section discusses the manifestation of attendance within the labour process. Firstly, it interprets the absence behaviour within the four organizations and discusses employees’ intentions for absence as an outcome of the lean working regime. Next, the section discusses the reasons underneath the drop of absence in all case study organizations, and stresses the argument that absence as an expression of industrial conflict is muted, while consent to attendance emerges. Particularly, the current recession, the absence management process, the flexibility approach, and the role of line managers, elucidate why employees were discouraged to utilize absence as an expression of discontent, and explain employees’ consent to workplace attendance. The final part of this chapter introduces the ‘Rebels of the clock’ thesis, interpreting the ‘games’ played by employees on the shop floor and the overall struggle towards working time and workplace attendance.

This section suggests that employees, across both countries, have developed more sophisticated and silent tactics to express their discontent, which did not jeopardize their employment status and at the same time consented to regular attendance, their subordination, and the labour process.

9.3.1.1 Consent to workplace attendance

Participants in both countries discussed the non-genuineness of absence, suggesting a variety of reasons for individuals to call in absent. The authors have concluded that the true cause of absence is impossible to be determined (McCurdy and Bowey, 1982), as the reasons stated for absence are often not the real ones (Huczynski and Fitzpatrick, 1989). Consequently, it would be misleading to assume that the supermarket employees' decision to go absent is based on a single factor. However, in this research, participants have discussed the organization of work as the main driver for the employees' decision to be absent. Indeed, absence was discussed as the first sign of discontent. Employees in all cases discussed the boring and the repetitive nature of the job, the limited variety of tasks, the long shifts, the rude customers, the relationship with the line manager and the monotony of the job as reasons not to attend. Therefore, in line with John's (1997) suggestion that "absenteeism does not have a simple etiology", in this research the political economy analysis suggests non-attendance is a multi-factor result within the complex and stratified social reality of the supermarket shop floor and the dynamics that govern the organization of work. Yet, it is accepted that for different individuals, the elements of the latter, as described in the findings chapter, have different influence in their decision to attend. However, employees' intentions of absence - as an outcome of the working regime - are unquestionable, confirming academic debates that discuss absence as an expression of conflict (Edwards, 1986; Edwards and Whitston, 1993). In other words, as it was concluded in the section above, the organization of work in food retailing was a source of tensions on the shop floor, which was, or was *intended* to be expressed through non-genuine absence. Yet, as this section discusses below, and as it was signaled in the findings and earlier in this chapter, absence, across the four case studies, was discouraged in practice, and consent to attendance emerged.

What was interesting in the data was the participants view regarding the utilization of [non-genuine] sickness as an excuse for absence. CIPD (2014, 2011a) recognizes sickness as the major cause for absence, however, it is not clear whether this is genuine or non-genuine absence, whereas the CBI (2011) research reports contradictory results. On one hand, it argues that genuine illness is the major driver of absence and that 93% of the employers point to this as a driver of absence. On the other hand, employers estimate that a considerable percentage of working time is lost due to non-genuine sickness absence. In this research, the findings come to some agreement with these reports. Although sickness

absence was indeed a reason for absence, participants discussed the non-genuineness of sickness absence. According to both participant employees and managers, employees, in both countries, were using sickness absence as a plea to take time off work. However, this tactic was exercised in a more sophisticated way in order to avoid the penalization of their absence. For example, managers in the UK suggested that the employees were using stress as the most common reason to go absent, because of the invisible symptoms of the sickness, and because the line managers, who were not medically trained, could not identify the genuineness or non-genuineness of the absence. Unlike the CIPD (2014) report, which identifies stress as the fourth common cause for absence, in this research the UK data identify it as the most common due to the invisibility of the medical signs to the manager.

Similarly, in Cyprus, according again to the managers' view, employees were using sickness and particularly pregnancy and child sickness as the most common reasons to take time off work. This research suggests that the feminization of the food retail sector (Akehurst and Alexander, 1995) could be a source for non-genuine absence. This is supported by participants' view that sickness was often related to pregnancy or child sickness, which, as it was found, would not be confronted by the managers. Therefore, employees were feeling safe to non-genuinely claim pregnancy issues or child sickness to take time off work. Yet, as it is discussed later in this chapter, managers have been suspicious regarding absence and they often refused requests for time off or utilized controls to ensure the genuineness of absence, such as asking for doctor notes, or requesting employees to attend sick and, therefore, controlled attendance, through a coercive approach.

Although intentions of non-genuine absence were evident in all the four case study organizations, the data revealed the decrease of incidences related to this behaviour. In the UK cases, secondary data clearly showed the drop in absence in the organizations. This is confirmed by the CIPD (2014) report, which shows that overall absence levels have fallen per employee, in comparison to previous years. ONS (2014b) similarly reports that the sickness absence levels have fallen significantly since 1993. A European report also shows a widespread trend of decrease of absence across Europe after 2008. Cyprus saw an increase in absence during the first years of the crisis, which, though, was followed by a significant decrease in 2011, when the crisis had a greater impact on the economy (Eurofound, 2013). This was confirmed by the participants in this research who

commented that absence was not a common phenomenon in the two Cyprus organizations anymore.

In this research, the focus is not to measure the absence level in the four case studies. The aim is to examine attendance within the social relations on the shop floor and the labour process, as well as to conceptualize the reasons beneath the evident drop of absence and the organization of consent. It is argued that the similarities in the working regime across the two countries [see Wal-Martization] have indeed generated *intentions* for absence. However, the similar control mechanisms imposed by the four organizations resulted in the drop of this behaviour. In fact, data illustrated that the decrease of both genuine and non-genuine absence in both countries, as it was discussed by participants. This was the overall outcome of the current recession, the absence management processes, and the role of line managers within the latter.

The recession was described as a main driver for the drop of absence across the two countries. Participants, in all cases, discussed the current economic crisis and the rising unemployment as the main factors that affected the employees' decision to always attend at work. Employees reported feelings of job insecurity, as well as the tangible financial impact on their monthly salary due to absence. Although such views were common in both countries, employees in Cyprus were experiencing the recession's influence in more intense, comparing to the employees in the UK. For example, in Cy2 the recent redundancies generated higher fear and job insecurity, whereas in Cy1 the fear for future redundancies was evident in the data. These issues link to the 'Survivor Syndrome' argument, which is a mixture of 'behaviours and emotions often exhibited by remaining employees following an organizational downsizing' (Appelbaum et al., 1997, p.81). One of these emotions, as it was evident in this research, is job insecurity, with survivors worrying about losing their jobs. Given the limited availability of other jobs and the rising unemployment in the Cyprus market, this has influenced employees' work behaviours and attitude on a daily basis, evidencing the lower absence as the data showed. Unlike authors who suggest that job insecurity is related to intentions to leave and absenteeism (see Thornhill and Saunders, 1998b, p.282), this research showed that this state led to the drop in absence because of the increasing unemployment in the country. Unsurprisingly, and in line with the findings in this thesis, studies showed that increases in unemployment rates led to drop of absence, as employees exhibit less comfort to move to a different job. In addition, individuals believe that employers are more likely to dismiss frequently absent

employees in periods when economic conditions are not favourable (Leigh, 1985; Larson & Fukami, 1985 in Harrison and Martocchio, 1998, p.323). As Taylor et al. (2010) note, and as it was evident in this study, the employers used the competitive economic pressures in the market, to alter the terms of the wage-effort bargain, and the negotiation on attendance, by nurturing feelings of insecurity to the workforce. Consequently, the latter, complied with the managers' requirements for regular attendance, whilst presenteeism also emerged within all the case study organizations.

Participants, in all the organizations, acknowledged instances of individuals attending at work sick, whereas they discussed not only the drop in non-genuine absence, as well as the reduction of 'sickness calls'. This showed the increase in 'presenteeism', with employees attending work while being sick under the fear of losing their job. Indeed, similarly to this research, Patton (2012) reports that during economic downturns employees are more likely to attend at work sick, whereas the most important reason for their decision is job insecurity. Likewise, Taylor et al (2010, p. 282) report that, 'many employees were dragging themselves into work when sick, fearful...of losing their job'. This fear is more intense in periods of economic crisis, when unemployment rises and, at the same time, there is a very high demand for jobs (Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) describes the case of a new supermarket store in the south of England, which had received 782 applications in 2013 for the thirteen jobs on offer. This study has found a similar case when Cy1 opened a new store in 2012, where more than 800 applications were received for just eighteen new checkout jobs. Clearly, the high demand of jobs and the competition in the labour market has increased the employees' feeling fear of losing their job, discouraged absence and nurtured 'presenteeism'.

Additionally, Johns (2007) notes that 'presenteeism' is associated with job insecurity due to company downsizing or restructuring as it was found in the case of Cy2. The author, similar to this thesis, also suggests that 'presenteeism' occurs when employees do not perceive absenteeism as an available option because it is expensive, especially in an era of austerity (in Quazi, 2014, p.47-48). CIPD (2014) also reports that 'presenteeism' is an increasing behaviour within organizations. However, the actions to manage this behaviour were limited. In fact, the managers in this research encouraged 'presenteeism', as it is discussed below in more detail, as they preferred to have enough bodies on the shop floor, even if they did not produce the maximum of their ability. Managers have neglected the negative outcomes of this behaviour, such as lower productivity or even future sick

absences, and the organizations have clearly ignored the hidden costs of it (Bierla et al., 2011; Quazi, 2014). Therefore, although 'presenteeism' did not impact on the attendance targets, it generated further issues, which, though, were not acknowledged in any of the four organizations.

To sum up, the data revealed the drop of absence and the increase of 'presenteeism' in both countries, with employees substituting sickness absence with sickness presence (MacGregor et al., 2008). Indeed, the data suggested that many employees faced enormous pressures to attend when ill. This confirms Edwards and Scullion (1982, p.107) who suggested that workers 'attend work for most of the time', and, as Taylor et al (2010, p.283) conclude, "it is true that regularity of attendance has characterised workers' behaviour, whether through habit, fear of sanction or ingrained socialisation". In this study, the current recession, the rising unemployment in the countries, and the consequent feelings of insecurity, were the main drivers for this behaviour to emerge (Quazi, 2014).

However, the drop of absence and the consequent increase of presenteeism were not solely outcomes of the recession. As the chapter discusses next, the increase of presenteeism was an outcome of the conflicting approaches taken by the organizations to manage absence. Similar to Taylor et al's (2010) conclusion, it is argued here that in order to understand attendance in the contemporary workplace the research needs to explore the nature of managerial and absence control and the employment relations in conditions of economic recession. Indeed, as the data of this study showed, the approach to manage attendance was, on one hand, "one of stick rather than carrot" (Edwards and Whiston, 1993, p.7), whereas on the other hand the somehow similar flexible and the accommodating approach taken by managers across the four case studies, influenced the employee's decision to attend work. As it is discussed in this chapter, employees complied with the general duty to attend work regularly (Edwards and Scullion, 1982, Taylor et al., 2010). This acceptance of regular attendance, as well as the increase of 'presenteeism', across the four organizations, was not plainly the result of the current recession in the two countries but the outcome of a complex system of attendance control.

Absence management was a priority in all the organizations because of the costs accompanied with this behaviour. Indeed, the aggressive price war and consequently the pressures for lower costs, made absenteeism a costly behaviour in the organizations, hence a problem that needed to be managed (Edwards and Whitston, 1993). Undeniably, in this highly competitive market attendance is critical as the work organization evidently

becomes leaner (Taylor et al., 2010). In the era of austerity, food retailers in both countries had no option but to proceed with a leaner work organization, within which the management of absence was a prominent issue in the daily agenda of managers. Therefore, in both the UK and Cyprus, the management of attendance was in the forefront of the employers' agenda, in order to keep costs low and survive in this highly competitive environment.

Data revealed a two-tier approach in managing attendance across both countries. As it was noted above, all organizations were managing attendance through two conflicting approaches. The first approach suggested the penalization of absence, as similarly Carter et al. (2014) found in the Civil service sector, whilst the second approach, as it was evident in all cases, focused more on the prevention of absence through flexibility and accommodation. However, significant differences were identified between the two countries regarding the formality of these approaches, while the outcome was similar, which was the drop of absence and the increase in sickness presence.

In the UK, both organizations implemented a centralized three-stage absence policy, which suggested the punishment of absence. The research, similarly to Hopkins (2014), showed that employees in both case studies expressed fear of being disciplined and potentially been dismissed due to personal absence. Non-attendance is one of the main reasons for discipline actions (CIPD, 2014; Edwards, 2005; P. Edwards and Whitston, 1993; Taylor et al., 2010) and as the deviance model of absenteeism clearly suggests, discipline lies at the heart of absence management (Johns, 1997). Indeed, both UK organizations used the 'traffic light system' ['green, amber, red'] to define the stages of the policy, flagging in this way the importance of absence as the employee progressed through the policy, describing the final stage [red] as the most crucial, as it led to disciplinary hearings and the issue of warnings.

Ashdown and Baker (1973) (in Edwards, 2005, p.377) make a distinction between 'coercive and corrective' approaches to discipline, arguing that organizations do not apply the former, which is based on strict rules and punishment, and tend to perceive discipline as a process to change a behaviour, rather than to punish faults. Thus, discipline of non-attendance is not anymore solely an action to punish the employee for being absent, but a corrective process within which organizations aim to alter a negative behaviour. This is partly accepted in this research. In the two UK cases, the first two stages of the process aimed to correct absence behaviour, whereas the last stage was undeniably a certain

disciplinary action, within which the employees were receiving warnings and therefore faced potential punishments for their absence. This explains the increase of 'presenteeism' in the UK organizations (Hopkins, 2014). In the era of austerity, due to the potential punishment for absence, employees were fearful of losing their job. Hence, they complied and attended work regularly, even sick, in order not to trigger the formal policy, or even prove to their manager that they were genuinely not well, as Hopkins (2014) similarly finds.

Edwards (2005) argues that generally the power to discipline absence, shifts from supervisors to specialist managers, while contradictorily others suggest that line managers play a vital role in managing absenteeism and actively participate in disciplinary processes (ACAS, 2011). This research highlighted a median involvement of line managers in the disciplinary approach. Although they were involved in all the stages, including the red stage/disciplinary, they could not take decisions regarding the issue of warnings without the approval of the HR manager, whereas only the store manager was taking decisions for any dismissals.

Nevertheless, line managers were the key players in the implementation of the procedure. Contrary to Edward's (2005, p.393) argument, that despite the cost pressures and the development of lean organizations, absenteeism has not been a prominent issue in the daily agenda of line managers, the evidence in this study showed a different insight, with line managers being the key players in the management of absence. Similarly to other research (see Cunningham and James, 2000; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2003), this thesis found that line managers - in both UK cases - carried out the daily tasks of the policy and they were responsible for the implementation of the three stages. Clearly, the Wal-Martization trend, as the main driver for lower costs, brought the management of absence to the forefront and drove the involvement of line managers within the absence policy. Hence, line managers in the UK had a primary responsibility to manage the absence policy (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002).

In Cyprus, the data, surprisingly, showed the absence of a formal attendance policy in both case studies, in contrast to the CIPD (2014) report, which shows that 95% of the surveyed organizations in the UK had a written absence/attendance policy, including very small companies (1-9 employees). Yet, this was somehow expected for Cy1 because of the small size of the organization, and besides this was the norm in the Cyprus market as

European data revealed. EWCO⁵ and EIRO⁶ showed that employers in Cyprus, similarly to Cy1 and Cy2, did not regard absence as a cause of concern. This could justify the lack of measures to reduce the levels of absence, as well as the absence of any formal attendance policies in most organizations in the country. Yet, this was still a surprise for Cy2 as it was expected that this company would follow the absence policy of the parent company, or, at least, have some regulations introduced from abroad. However, this is not to argue that the two organizations did not manage absence. The data revealed a story far from this, with the two organizations adopting a punitive approach and minimum tolerance to absence. In particular, despite the lack of formal attendance policies, the two organizations adopted a similar approach to manage absence, within which line managers played a crucial role. Line managers were the first point of contact for the employees to report their absence and they were responsible to edit the rotas and to cover absences. Nevertheless, they enjoyed limited authority within this process as it is discussed later in this chapter.

The above discussion leads to Godard's (2011) explanation of 'triumph of capitalism'. The author suggests that the capitalists have set mechanisms in place to resolve and, in this case, to control conflict behaviours. Referring to McGovern et al (2007) the author gives the example of absenteeism as an alternative to strikes, and describes it as a traditional form of resistance (p.293). However, similarly to this research, he notes that because of the monitoring systems set in place by the top management, whether these are formal (UK), or informal (Cyprus), absenteeism is a behaviour that is punished; therefore employees are intimidated to use it as such. Hence, the way that absence was managed across all cases, generated fear for employees of being penalized, and limited their capacity to resist their superior's authority over attendance (Godard, 2011).

Theoretically speaking, as Taylor et al. (2010, p. 283) conclude, management across the four case study organisations attempted "to solve the problem of the indeterminacy of labour's *attendance* [emphasis original] through coercion rather than consensus or mutuality". Indeed, absence was "likely to be a more fateful issue for workers [especially during a period of recession] than it had been in the past" (Edwards and Whiston, 1993, p.9), and this concern was mainly triggered through the formal policies in the UK, and the informal practices in Cyprus, which suggested a punitive approach to manage attendance (Carter et al., 2014). Therefore, the obligation to attend work is currently the dynamic that

⁵ European Working Conditions Observatory

⁶ European Industrial Relations Observatory

drives attendance control, with employees attending regularly to avoid discipline and to overcome their fear of sanction.

However, similarly to Godard (2011, p.293), this thesis also finds that the ‘sources of peace have also been strengthened’, leaving little space for absenteeism, challenging part of Taylor et al’s (2010) conclusion [see above], and suggesting that besides coercion, attendance across the case studies of this research, was indeed managed through consensus. CIPD (2014) reports that the most common method to manage [short-term] absence was the focus on procedures to monitor and deter absence, including return-to-work interviews, attendance reviews, disciplinary actions, and providing sickness absence information to line managers. However, this research showed that all the organizations adopted a flexible approach in managing attendance, emphasizing the prevention of absence rather than the management of finite absence occasions. In all cases, managers offered alternative options to employees to go off work rather than calling in sick. This had resulted in the significant reduction of absence levels within all the stores examined, across the two countries.

The data suggest a double approach to attendance management, across all cases, with organizations focusing more on consent building and cooperation, rather than coercing attendance. This is not to argue that coercion was absent within the attendance control system, as it was discussed above. However, as Burawoy (1979, p.27) puts it, “...coercion must be supplemented by the organisation of consent”. Employees might indeed have complied with the organisational directions, whereas the classic arguments for a continual battle with the management, and/or towards the organization of work are replaced by arguments referring to consent and co-operation within the employment relationship. Going back to Godard (2011), the author reports that employees accept their subordination and suggests that the causes of conflict in general have declined with sources of peace increasing. Hence the erosion of the will to struggle via absence (Hyman, 1989) is the result of the new managerial paradigm evident in the four organizations, as it is described next, which aims to prevent absence through an accommodative approach. Understandably, absence control becomes a complex issue, which depends on contradictory managerial practices. Indeed, the employers necessarily have to secure employees’ consent and at the same time retain control over the employees’ attendance behaviour.

Interestingly, in the UK, the organizations have developed formal policies that regulated the flexible and accommodative approach on attendance management. For example, in UK1, the management team developed the '48hours notice' policy, which was gradually becoming a centralized formal policy for the organization because of the positive results on attendance. The policy suggested that when the employees give their line manager two days' notice for time off work, then it is a guaranteed 'Yes'. This policy contributed to the significant drop of absence levels within the organization. The employees discussed that this option gave them flexibility in their attendance and kept them safe from triggering the formidable formal policy, whereas managers suggested that this policy provided them enough time to manage and cover absence. Thus, it is understood that the new policy offered flexibility across the shop floor and across the managerial pyramid to both employees and managers.

It is important to recognize what lies beneath the scope of the policy. Although employees might have perceived the flexibility policy as the path not to be pointed as absent and troublemakers, the main reason that the store team initially introduced this practice was to manage the high levels of absence. Of course, this is reasonable. However, through this approach, line managers were principally manipulating the absence levels in their departments by encouraging employees to use the flexible options and therefore not adding to the department's absence level. A similar situation was found in both cases in the UK. Evidence showed that the line managers, who had a great involvement in this process, often encouraged employees to use alternative leave options, even in cases when the employees called in sick. Recognizing the positive impact of the flexible approach to the departmental targets, line managers, across the UK organizations, offered these options to avoid high absence and to secure low absence levels in their department.

Edwards' studies analysed the negotiation of *informal* workplace rules, suggesting that such practices grew up on the shop floor and a relaxed approach by management to absence control was evident (Edwards & Scullion 1982; Edwards & Whitston, 1993). The authors' findings, similar to this study, suggest the links between consent and attendance (Edwards and Whiston, 1993, Burawoy, 1978). Particularly, Edwards and Whitston (1993) conclude that the management in British Rail had to rely on negotiation to obtain worker compliance and organize consent and note that 'labour relations on the railways have traditionally been marked by a distinct balance of conflict and accommodation' (p.129). In other words, the authors show a 'connection between formal discipline and the day-to-day

negotiation of order' (p.121). The data in this study, as it was already discussed, suggested the generation of a particular attendance culture within the two UK organizations, as well as the Cyprus cases, as discussed next. Within these cultures the managers, similar to Edwards and Whitston (1993) case study, were involved in a conflicting approach to control absence (coercive and accommodative), while employees complied and consented to regular attendance. Regarding the former approach, as already explained, compliance to attendance was the result of fear and job insecurity, while the latter approach nurtured consent as the outcome of co-operation and accommodation. Although these findings agree with other research (see for example, Edwards, 2005, Edwards and Whitston, 1993; Taylor et al, 2010), this study comes to discuss the formalization of the 'consensus based approach' to absence control within the two UK case study organizations. To explain more, in contrast to Edwards and Whitston (1993) discussion of the informal workplace rules, UK1 and UK2, have formalized co-operation on workplace attendance through the introduction of formal flexible policies. The '48hours notice' policy in UK1 and the 'me-time' policy in UK2, have introduced new normative controls on attendance, which step away from a 'hegemonic' shop floor regime regarding the management of attendance, and moved towards a cooperative culture of absence control, within which the employees' perceptions of managerial support in work-life balance builds consent through co-operation. Both line managers and employees discussed their preference to this approach, which suggests their converged interests regarding workplace attendance.

Additionally, the line managers' preference to manage attendance through the 'flexibility/consensus route' was related to their unwillingness to be involved in the formal absence process either because they do not perceive themselves as HR experts (Renwick, 2003), and/or because they were afraid to be criticized for poor performance (Papalexandris and Panayotopoulou, 2005). The latter argument also explains the implementation of the formal policy '*by the book*', and the perception that the formal policy was a safety net to the line managers' decisions. Therefore, line managers were trying to avoid to trigger of the formal absence policy, and they attempted to manage absence, and prevent unplanned absence, through the flexibility approach. This approach was subjected to limitations though, as the top management policed the line managers' role within it. However, line managers enjoyed higher authority within this approach rather the formal policy as this was a task linked directly to their discretion, in an attempt by the top management to increase flexibility within the working time organization.

A similar flexible approach was found in Cyprus. Unsurprisingly, this was not regulated by any formal written policies. In these two organizations, the offer of alternative leave options was more an informal practice that was developed over the years, as managers identified the positive impact on absence behaviour (Edwards and Whitston, 1993). Therefore, although absence in the Cyprus cases was mainly managed through a coercive approach, more evidence corroborated the notion that managers adopted a humanitarian and consensus approach towards absence, arguing that they were flexible to employees' circumstances and often accommodated them, which similarly to the UK, resulted in less [non-genuine] absence calls. The line managers in the two Cyprus case studies adopted a conflicting approach to manage attendance, swinging between coercion and cooperation. Additionally, unlike the absence management practices in the two organizations, which suggested a punitive approach for absence, line managers in Cyprus, similarly to the UK, enjoyed higher authority to implement the flexibility approach. However, their authority and discretion depended on the level of authority allowed by the HR and the store manager. The more autocratic the management style of the latter, the less the discretion of line managers.

More discussion on line managers' authority follows in the next section of this chapter. What this section will continue to emphasize is the significant drop in absence within all the case study organizations. The exegesis for this drop, as the data, as well as the discussion in this chapter showed, is complex. It would be too simplistic to argue that the recession and the increasing unemployment are the only drivers for the drop in absence. This thesis has developed a sociological analysis and suggests that the way that absence is managed within the organizations, in conjunction with the recession, play a vital role in absence drop. The sociological perspective taken in this thesis though, suggests that we cannot just merely acknowledge the drop in absence, but we need to understand what this means and how it is articulated within the employment relationship.

This thesis stresses the argument that non-attendance as a form of resistance is regarded as muted. Various authors have examined the manifestation of non-attendance as conflict (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004b; Edwards, 1990; Edwards and Whitston, 1993). For example, Hyman (1989b) reports that absenteeism and turnover are forms of unorganized conflict, whereas similarly Hebdon and Noh (2013) develop a framework, within which they conceptualize different forms of conflict, locating non-attendance as an individual action of contestation. Therefore, according to Edward and Whiston (1993), absenteeism is

portrayed today as a classic practice of conflict expression. However, the association between attendance and industrial conflict has been overemphasized in the literature, with authors often neglecting the wider context within which this behaviour emerges. Hayday (n.d.) reports that absence is a complex issue to understand, which might differ for individuals at different times and in different contexts. This is supported by Edwards (1986), who reports that the context of the industry is a crucial to be considered, and Edwards and Scullion (1982), who report that for a particular behaviour can be labelled as conflict, [absence in this case], depends on the context and the control system, in which it exists.

In this research, *intentions* for non-attendance were evident in the data in both countries and across the four organizations. As the data, as well as this chapter have suggested, the work organization and the characteristics of the food retail job generated tensions within the employment relationship, which, arguably led to these intentions for non-attendance. Of course, this cannot be generalized for every individual on the shop floor. Non-attendance might mean different things to different people in different types of different situations” (Goodman and Atkin, 1984, p.288). The characteristics of the food retail working regime, as well as the ‘frontier of control’, generated pressures and tensions within the employment relationship and as Edwards and Scullion (1982) argue, although absenteeism is not a form of direct resistance, similar to this research, it still reflects a clash of interest between employees and the employer. Hence, overall, there are strong grounds for non-attendance to be perceived as a manifestation of conflict (Edwards, 1986, p.256).

Even though such arguments are widely accepted in industrial sociology research, some have indirectly challenged them. According to some authors, absenteeism should not always be perceived as a form of resistance. It remains true that people go absent for different reasons (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.25). Blyton and Turnbull (2004) argue that employees rarely see absence as a policy of resistance, while this behaviour is also adopted as a mechanism to relieve tension and frustration with a workplace incident, rather an attempt to change the situation. For example, Edwards and Scullion’s (1982) case study on clothing factories shows that absenteeism did not directly challenged managerial control and the behaviour was not expressed as direct resistance. In the same vein, it is reported by Edwards (1986) that employees are not using absenteeism “as a way of getting back to the management” (p.256).

In this study, although the intentions for absence were evident, this is far from suggesting that employees actually utilized non-attendance to express their discontent. As data showed and as this chapter has already discussed, absence dropped within all organizations because of the recession and the way this behaviour was managed. Therefore, the four organizations managed to control attendance behaviour through the two conflicting approaches and discouraged employees to utilize it extensively, by inspiring on one-hand feelings of fear, and on the other hand covertly manipulating their attendance behaviour through an accommodative and flexible approach. Edwards (1986, p.278) argues: “Workplace behaviour does not come in pre-packaged forms such as absenteeism...but is the product of the wider social relations governing work”. Indeed, the social relations within the cases of this thesis were the dynamics that hindered the utilization of absence as industrial conflict and built coercion and consent to workplace attendance through the utilization of two conflicting approaches respectively. Theoretically speaking, although intentions of absence still represented a denial by employees to accept the managerial logic for minimization of labour costs and retention of control over the labour process (Edwards and Scullion, 1982), in practice, the employees, in both countries, were left with no space to express their discontent via non-attendance. This was the outcome of the controls put in place to manage attendance, whether these aimed coercion or consent building. Therefore, the opportunity to engage in absence as an expression of resistance can be regarded as increasingly muted. This conformity to the regular patterns of workplace attendance reflects compliance to the attendance management process in the organizations, as well as the wider economic environment of austerity (Thompson et al., 2013, p.131). However, it is not suggested that the employees’ will to struggle was eroded. As it is discussed in the next section, industrial conflict was still embedded in the employment relationship. Yet it existed in a different and a more silent form, whilst, again, it co-existed with consent.

9.3.1.2 ‘Rebels of the clock’ and ‘game playing’

The section above concluded that absence as a form of resistance could be regarded as muted. Although the data has revealed intentions for absence, the organizations controlled this behaviour through the conflicting approaches in absence management. As it was discussed above, the management controlled the absence behaviour on the shop floor through generating feelings of fear to employees and offering them flexible options for time off work. This showed that the management discouraged the utilization of non-attendance as an expression of industrial conflict and built consent and obligations/compliance to regular attendance.

However, this is far from educing a conclusion that contestation within the employment relationship was absent. Although the frontier of *absence control* has shifted massively in management's favour, attendance remains part of the contested terrain of the employment relationship (Taylor et al., 2010). Industrial conflict is still part of the food retailing organizational life, but it was expressed in an individual, silent, and spontaneous way (Salaman, 2001). Indeed, the nature of contestation has changed significantly since the classic sociological studies established their important conceptual verities (Taylor et al., 2010, p.283). Similar to Hyman (1989b, p.113) it is argued that: "the suggestion that there is no conflict...within modern industry cannot be taken seriously" and as Mumby (2005) suggests workplace resistance is alive and flourishing. Indeed, "resistance remains a persistent, significant, and a remarkable feature of the contemporary workplace, which requires further and more detailed examination" (Collinson, 1994, p. 25). It would be 'presumptuous to infer that the food retail workplace is harmonious or conflict free' (Taylor and Bain, 2003, p. 1488).

Following the balloon hypothesis, which suggests that if you squeeze a balloon at one place it expands on others (Sapsford and Turnbull, 1994), this thesis also stressed the question of how food retail employees articulate their resistance within this workplace regime, since absence was not anymore an option. The findings revealed an interesting picture, which, similar to other research (Hebdon and Noh, 2013; Mumby, 2005; Salaman, 2001), put forward the argument that resistance is a silent state that does not jeopardise the workers' employment status. The authors suggest that resistance is not static, it is less expressed through formal disputes, such as strikes, it has been developed, it has changed forms, and it has been adapted to the 'new capitalism' (Jermier et al., 1994). This is evident in the UK and European Statistics data, which clearly show the significant decline of strike actions across Europe, and a decline in trade union density in both Cyprus and the UK (Curtarelli et al., 2013; Eurofound, 2013; ONS, 2014a, Williams, 2014). However, the decline of union density cannot be taken to be as 'synonymous with the disappearance of workplace resistance and conflict' (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p. 146). This research suggests that conflict is still embedded in the employment relationship, as classical writings suggest. Yet considering the declining trade union density in the UK and the complete absence of any trade unions in the Cyprus food retailing sector, it is argued that conflict took a different form and it was expressed through individual actions (Hodson, 1995) and 'game playing' (Burawoy, 1985, Thompson, 1989). Unlike research that suggests that conflict is more likely to be expressed through informal actions, such as

absenteeism (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Hyman, 1989a; Jermier et al., 1994), this research suggests that resistance was indeed on a silent mode, but it took a form that did not jeopardize the employees' position on the shop floor.

The data illustrated a latent behaviour by workers across the four organizations. Although employees in all cases consented to attend work regularly, strong evidence, across both countries, showed that employees were 'playing games' (Burawoy, 1985) and were utilizing silent and individual actions to control the working time and to manipulate their time and presence on the shop floor. They were expressing in this way their discontent towards the working regime and the organization of food retail work.

Silent conflict within the food retailing it is not a completely unexplored area. Soares (2001) discusses for silent rebellions and describes the way supermarket cashiers resist on their job aspects. In particular, the author reports: "Cashiers are not objects, but real subjects who struggle daily to accomplish their work. *Cashiers resist*" [emphasis added] (p.113). This research evidences that resistance is embedded in food retailing and suggests that within this lean regime, employees, across the shop floor were indeed resisting. However, the data in this thesis revealed that employees utilized conflict actions that were rarely confronted by line managers, and did not jeopardize their employment status. Particularly, the manipulation of the working time with tactics of 'time wasting' (Ditton, 1972) and appropriation of time and effort (see Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.25) such as longer tea breaks, lateness and avoiding work tasks were the most common tactics utilized by workers in all cases. Yet, this is not to argue that conflict expression was uncontrolled. As the findings showed, the management teams across all cases introduced controls to manage these behaviours, such as, for example, longer breaks and lateness. This confirms Edwards (1990, p. 42) who suggests that co-operation and conflict co-exist, noting that employees do not divide their time between co-operating and shirking but, as he argues, "one activity can involve both". Indeed, labour relations involve the joint creation of conflict, co-operation, and consent. It is important at this point to emphasize the role of line managers within the shop floor relations, the negotiation of the shop floor order and the employees' decision to resist or to consent to the shop floor regime.

Clearly, working time and workplace attendance is still a contented issue on the grocery retail shop floor. This section will avoid repeating the actions that were discussed in the data [see chapter 8]. However, it should be noted that all these actions fit under the umbrella of 'Rebels of the clock'. Data showed that every action of expressing discontent

is strongly related to the working time and employees' presence on the shop floor. The work organization and the fact that employees felt pressured to attend at work regularly, as the previous section described, generated a regime that the worker was unable to escape. Yet this explains that the apparatuses of silent resistance were indeed attached to this pressure for attendance. For example, time wasting was a common action within all cases. In different departments, data showed a variety of 'games' and time wasting actions. These undeniably suggest that employees expressed their discontent to the pressure to be present on the shop floor and to consent the managerial command. Thompson (1989, p.160) defines games as 'informal rules and practices aimed at creating space and time, controlling earnings and making work more interesting'. Burawoy (1978, p. 271) notes that 'these games are modes of adaption, a source of relief from the irksomeness of capitalist work'. The author goes on to suggest that these games provide to workers the means to absorb frustration, to diffuse conflict and generally they facilitate 'adjustment to work', on one hand, and on the other hand 'they also tend to undermine managerial objectives, reduce productivity and waste time (p.270-271). In this research, these actions are the means to absorb the pressure to regular attendance. These connect to Thompson's (1989, p.161) argument that 'the pattern of games and practices shapes a distinctive pattern of conflict'. The author refers to the tensions within the employment as the consequence of the managerial control and allocation of sources, but suggests that these are often experienced as obstructions on the part of other workers and in turn 'accentuates a lateral conflict that is endemic to the organization of work' (Burawoy, 1979, p.66 in Thompson, 1989, p.161).

Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) suggest that not all activities can be directly related to a pattern of control and resistance. Indeed, it would be naïve to argue that all actions are forms of resistance. Similar to absence, the time, work, and product appropriation might mean different things to different people. For example, Paulsen (2013) in an attempt to introduce the concept of 'empty labour', which, as he claims, are private activities at work, discusses what these activities mean for the employee and comes with to conclusion that different individuals utilize them differently, such as coping mechanisms to boredom, a revenge back to the management, therefore misbehaviour or resistance. This is an unconvincing thesis though because Paulsen (2014, 2013) tends to describe every action as empty labour and utilizes the term as homogeneous across different occupations and working regimes (Paulsen, 2011), missing in this way to contextualize this behaviour. The author also fails to recognize the control mechanisms put in place to control the 'emptiness

of labour' and, therefore, fails to conceptualize the contestation of the employment relationship.

Although actions of empty labour are present on the food retail shop floor [private activities at work (Paulsen, 2013, p. 1)], this framework does not explain how employees utilize their presence on the shop floor, how they express their discontent, or whether they consent to the shop floor regime. Besides, as the data of this study showed, the management in all cases has indeed attempted to control 'game playing' behaviours. As this thesis shows, it is not fruitful to analyse only the activities that are not related to work – empty labour – but the theory needs to understand how employees utilize their working time within the labour process. This is the major contribution of this thesis suggesting that resistance is still inherent in the employment relationship and suggests that the contested nature of the food retail job is reflected in the actions of dissenting working time through 'game playing'. The contestation of the work organization and the class conflict are empirically practiced on the shop floor, but conceptually are part of the working time terrain.

Let us take the example of 'basket collecting' to clarify this argument. As it was found, basket collection was part of front-end employees' responsibilities. However, a closer look at the data showed that often employees, and particularly older employees, and those with longer tenure on the shop floor, were using this action as an expression of silent discontent. The employees were using this as an excuse to leave their till without coming into any direct confrontation with the line managers. However, there is enough evidence to suggest the latter action as a coping strategy towards the boredom and the monotony of the checkout job. Theoretically speaking, there are three different arguments to be made based on this data. Firstly, employees were using this tactic as a coping tactic, by leaving their post, whilst they were found to be chatting with other employees, or even walking around the shop floor. This leads us back to the empty labour argument, suggesting that employees were practising actions that were not related to their job. On the other hand, following the Ackroyd and Thompson's (1999) misbehaviour framework, this action is related to appropriation of time and work. As the data showed, often employees would leave their till on busy hours to pick up the baskets, in order to avoid the intensive job of serving customers, especially during busy hours on Fridays and Saturdays when the stores were busy with the customers queuing to be served. Clearly, this showed that employees chose when to carry out this task in order to avoid the busy front-end, whilst they often avoided

collecting the baskets on quiet days. For example, one employee in store2/Cy1 commented that her colleagues were leaving their till between 12:00-13:00 when the store was busy to avoid work and pretended to pick up the baskets. Therefore, it seems fair to suggest that this was a tactic utilized by particular employees in an attempt to avoid the checkout job by 'pretending to be busy'. This tactic was a clear expression of discontent towards the intensive checkout job and to a lesser degree a coping strategy or just a form of misbehaviour. This tactic, similarly to other actions identified in the data, was practiced within the working time framework with employees being present at the workplace, but ultimately being 'absent at work' (Ditton, 1972 in Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999, p.26).

Nevertheless, as Collinson (1994, p.50) suggests, "Whatever form resistance takes, it is always inextricably linked to organizational discipline, control, and power". Indeed, data have revealed attempts by management in all cases to control employees' actions of rebelling. Returning to the example above, a checkout employee in Cy1 suggested that many of the older employees left their till to collect the baskets. This employee suggested that they would do that until the line manager, who was present on the front-end, would tell them off. Therefore, the line manager played a significant role on front-line employees' behaviour and their decision to utilize such tactics to avoid the job. Participants discussed that this behaviour varied depending which manager was on the shift. They would not leave their till when a strict line manager was on duty, whilst this was more common when managers who were tolerant to this action were on duty, as they perceived it as part of the job. In all four cases, the data revealed attempts by the top management to address these actions through the introduction of new controls. For example, in UK2 the management team attempted to control the break duration through a new monitoring CCTV system, whereas in the two Cyprus organizations the line managers were responsible to monitor and time the tea break duration, and act appropriately for employees who violated the organizational rules.

Understandably, the line managers were involved in a constant negotiation with their subordinates to retain the shop floor order. The data revealed the line managers' role in controlling, as well as tolerating games on the shop floor, respectively imposing in this way coercion and building consent within the shop floor social relations. The example of longer breaks can clarify this argument. The data showed that in all the case study organizations the employees tended to sit on longer breaks, whilst the management teams, across all cases, attempted to control this behaviour through the line managers' role,

introducing a closer surveillance of tea breaks. What it was shown in the data was that the line managers' approach to this responsibility varied and the employees' accordingly adjusted their behaviour. For example, in UK2 the checkout line managers, following the top management directions, were intolerant to longer breaks and, consequently, employees on the front end consented to this new regime and could not 'play this game' anymore to appropriate working time and effort. In Cy1, the checkout line managers would tolerate longer breaks from employees with experience on the front end, within a 'give and take' relationship, whilst they would reprimand younger employees for sitting longer for their break. This shows that line managers in this organization were negotiating working time and attendance with older employees, tolerating the bending of the rules because they know that this is the only way to get work done, (Edwards, 1990b, p.47) and coerced punctuality for younger employees, who consented to this regime. This agrees with Williams (2014, p.300) conclusion that some types of industrial conflict, such a longer breaks in this case, can operate in the benefit of the managers, who might tolerate such behaviour in order to maintain control, and as this thesis argues, to maintain the shop floor order and meet the targets.

What it is interesting in the Cyprus data, and particularly Cy1, was the utilization of cliques by line managers as the platform of negotiation and coercion. As the data showed, the line managers would adjust their approach to the employees' behaviour based on clique memberships. This explains the informality of the negotiations for shop floor order across all the four organizations. Although in all cases new directions were imposed by the top management to manage certain behaviours, line managers adjusted their behaviour, based on informal shop floor relations. These arguments confirm Edwards (1990b, p.53) who notes "workers and managers are tied together in relations of co-operation and conflict and endeavour to work out acceptable compromises". Additionally, as Delbridge and Lowe (1997) suggest the role and the practices of line managers are crucial to understand the nature of the workplace relations and the labour process. This argument agrees with the data in this study, which, consistently to the latter authors' study, illustrate that the line managers are involved in negotiations, and aim to reach accommodations with their subordinates to keep the shop floor in order. Finally, Bolton and Houlihan (2010) stress the 'powerlessness' of front-line managers, whilst problems related to service delivery is frequently undermined by the centralization of decision making within head office. Similar in this study, although the line managers may lack power, as a result of the

close monitoring from above, they informally negotiated and mediated workers' actions on the shop floor and built consent.

9.4 Line managers: A crucial actor with limited authority

Undeniably, line managers fulfilled a central role in the management of absence across the four case studies examined. As the findings showed, and as it was noted in a previous section, line managers were the key players within this process. Regardless whether this was specified by a formal policy, as it was illustrated in the UK cases, or whether their role was driven by a best practice approach, as it was found in the Cyprus cases, line managers had a significant role to play within the two conflicting approaches of managing attendance. As Townsend (2014, p. 160) puts it, the line manager is the “fulcrum in a lever system” and as this study confirms, the line managers act as the ‘leverage’ for workplace attendance. This section scrutinises this issue and argues that line managers, across the two countries, held distinguished insights towards the management of absence. The analysis of the group micro-politics, revealed interesting findings suggesting that the management of attendance was not as simple and straightforward as the participants discussed it; rather it is a complex sociological issue within the structure of control, with line managers fulfilling a versatile role to control and, at the same time, accommodate attendance. Similar to McCabe (2014), line managers employed both ‘rational’ and ‘normative’ controls in an attempt to produce a consenting environment that challenged managerially defined norms, swinging between coercion and co-operation.

Unlike Child and Partridge's (1982) classic writings, suggesting that absenteeism is hardly found as a part of the supervisors' job, this research clearly shows that line managers have a central role in managing attendance at work. Renwick (2009) reports that nowadays the involvement of line managers in HRM is a ‘common practice’ and it is perceived as an obvious core part of an HRM approach to the employment relationship. This follows Legge's (1989, p.28) famous comment, that “HRM is vested in line management”. Indeed, similarly to Dunn and Wilkinson (2002) line managers in this research had a primary responsibility in HRM and absence management in particular, while likewise to Robson and Mavin (2011) front-line managers' played a crucial role in the effective management of sickness absence.

As the data showed managers implemented the two approaches in absence management. On one hand, they managed sickness absence effectively, in favour of the organization.

Particularly, through an authoritarian and coercive approach the line managers pressured the employees to attend at work sick. In both countries, despite the (in)formality of the practice, managers generated feelings of fear to employees to attend sick and effectively contributed to the reduction of [sickness] absence. On the other hand, the line managers, across all cases, introduced feelings of liability to employees to attend at work even sick through the flexibility approach. Data showed that employees in all cases were keener to attend regularly [even sick] for managers who were flexible and accommodated their circumstances. However, incidences of line managers not being flexible regarding attendance were not absent in the data, with some line managers, across all organizations, not using an accommodative approach, rather adopting an autocratic managerial style. This though generated tensions within the employment relationship, which was mainly expressed through refusals for overtime work. Evidently, ‘overtime ban’ for autocratic managers was an expression of discontent in all organizations. However, this should not be confused to authors’ discussion for ‘overtime ban’ as a collective industrial action (Williams, 2014). In this study this action was individual and spontaneous, and the decision was based on line managers’ approach to accommodate (or not) employees circumstances. What this data showed are the different approaches used by line managers to manage attendance, often using a mixture of consensus and coercion to achieve low levels of absence in their department, and the consequent consent or conflict by employees through overtime work or overtime ban.

What is important to highlight at this point is the involvement of line managers in absence control systems (Cunningham and James, 2000). For example, in Cyprus, despite the lack of formal attendance policies, the two organizations adopted a similar approach to manage absence, within which line managers played a crucial role. In fact, line managers were described as the first contact for the employees to report their absence and they were responsible to edit the rotas and covering absence. In the UK, similarly to other research, it was found that line managers were the key players in the implementation of the formal procedure and the flexibility approach. This confirms Carls (2009) who notes that “line managers are expected to be the contact person for all sorts of problems” and in this case absence was the problem to manage. Similarly to Edwards and Whitston (1993), line managers were responsible for their employees, whereas personnel managers wanted to push everything to the line (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002). Indeed, as it was found in the two UK case studies and in Cy2, and to some extent in Cy1, the HR devolved absence

management to the line, generating in this way pressures to the role, and held line managers accountable for high absence in their department.

However, the level of authority of line managers within this responsibility is debatable. For example, as data showed, line managers in the UK enjoyed higher level of authority within the flexibility approach, as the intervention of HR specialists was less common comparing to the formal policy. This partly agrees with Grugulis et al's (2011b) argument that managers had more freedom in people management issues. The need for consistency in the management of absence in the two UK organizations was well evident in the data. This generated constraints to the line managers' role within the formal absence policy. In both UK cases, line managers were closely monitored by the personnel department on how they managed absence, the decisions they took, and whether they followed the organizational policy. Child and Partridge (1982) similarly discussed that the intervention of specialists is common to ensure the following of the formal procedure. In fact, the HR Managers in UK2 suggested that monitoring the line managers' actions within the absence policy was part of their role, aiming to ensure the consistent implementation of the procedure. Additionally the HR manager in UK1 argued that line managers held various degrees of capability and experience, which inevitably led to inconsistency in the management of absence, and therefore necessitated the monitoring of their actions by the HR team. Indeed, HR specialists often intervened in the line managers' decisions, resulting in limited authority over attendance for the latter. All the HR managers who participated in this research commented that at some point they overruled line managers, intervened, and changed their decision.

In Cyprus, the line managers' authority, in both absence management practices, was also limited. As data suggested, similarly to the UK, line managers were 'caught' in a top-down authoritarian regime, within which the HR specialist in Cy2 and the store manager in store2/Cy1 were controlling the absence management process in the stores, and they were the decision makers within this process. Only line managers in the Head-store/Cy1 enjoyed some level of autonomy on how they would manage absence in their departments. Therefore, the line managers' authority depended on the level of autonomy allowed by the top management, suggesting that the managerial structure affected the line managers' authority. For example, in Cy2 the HR manager was always responsible to manage absence and although the organization attempted to devolve this responsibility to the line, it seemed that the HR manager still asserted control over the process. Papalexandris and

Panayotopoulou (2004) arguments explain this situation, reporting that HR managers experience a fear of reduction or even redundancy of their own work if HR is devolved to the line, while similarly Storey (1992) discuss that the HR devolution generates feelings of insecurity for personnel managers. Hence, the latter are reluctant to share their job and their knowledge with the line, basically due to their job insecurity feelings and lack the enthusiasm to enhance the line managers' role in HRM.

Similarly to other research (Townsend, 2014), HR and top managers, across all cases, stressed the lack of competencies and managerial skills for line managers. Yet this study argues that these claims were used by the top management to legitimate their intervention in line managers' role and job. For example, two HR managers in the UK, one in each case, suggested that the need for their intervention emerged through the lack of competencies and skill gaps of line managers. These participants described line managers as unconfident or unwilling to follow the procedures and to take appropriate decisions. Similarly, the store manager/Cy2 discussed the lack of competences for line managers to manage absence and, therefore, stressed the necessity to monitor their actions. In both the UK and Cyprus, top managers suggested that line managers did not have the adequate knowledge or willingness to manage their people, and that they did not hold the necessary competences to manage the complexity of the HR job, whilst they always sought for the specialists' help. This confirms Edwards and Whitston (1993) who found that HR managers, and in this research the top management team in general, felt that line managers were often unaware of the procedures of absence management, or were unwilling to take such responsibilities.

The line managers' ability to deliver practices is still an ongoing debate within the theoretical framework of HR devolvement to the line. Robson and Mavin (2011) have focused on the necessity to train line managers on absence management, describing it as a fundamentally important aspect of their role in this process. This thesis showed some similarities with the existing literature. Particularly, in the UK line managers were indeed trained on their overall HR role, and absence management, in particular, whereas, contradictorily, in Cyprus, none of the organizations provided any kind of training to line managers regarding their role in people management. However, the support of HR was present in all cases. Yet, this support was more a process of a top-down authoritarian monitoring to ensure consistency, rather than a practice to ensure discretion for line managers. Therefore, it is argued that the more formal procedures applied the less likely for

line managers to have authority over attendance issue (Child and Partridge, 1982), a fact that is mainly related to the UK cases of this study.

Grugulis et al. (2011b, p.204) report that the supermarket managers were both encouraged and expected to use their own discretion in the managing people. However, similarly to the latter authors, as well as the classic writings of Nichols and Beynon (1977), this research reveals that line managers in all cases were subjected to bureaucratic and direct control in their HR role and particularly in attendance management. For example, in the UK, they were expected to be bureaucrats with high responsibilities, but they were still monitored by the HR and store managers. Despite the evidence for higher discretion within the flexibility policy, data showed that the line managers' decisions were still formulated under the rules and regulations of the Head Office. Likewise, line managers in both Cyprus case study organizations could not escape the top-down scale of authority and were still accountable to carry out tasks attached to their managerial role, such as implementing the top management orders to the line, and convince employees to cover absences. Therefore, this research reveals that line managers in both the UK and Cyprus were subjects of direct control, holding high responsibilities, but were still monitored by the HR and store managers. In both countries the degradation of line managers' work was evidenced as they became solely responsible for the implementation of rules and procedures handed down by the top management (Rose et al, 1987) and held limited authority on decisions regarding the management of absence. Indeed, as Carter et al. (2014, p.328) note front-line managers are just as subject to control from above as other employees. Indeed, their power over attendance was less independent and more clearly subject to control from above.

Child and Partridge (1982) suggest that Taylorism and Scientific Management challenged the supervisory role with the introduction of specialist's departments. Similarly, the bureaucratic system of control, followed and co-existed to technical change has affected the supervisory role, and specifically as Gourdner (1960) (in Hirszowicz, 1985, p.116) suggests, "Increased bureaucratization contributes to the limitation of supervisory power". Indeed, similar to Hales (2001a), this research showed that the centralization of control resulted the reduction of the line managers' function who are left responsible to enforce rules and standards set by others, whereas the centralized control was mainly related to people management issues (Lloyd and Payne, 2014), and particularly attendance in this study. Similarly to Grugulis et al.'s (2011b) supermarket managers, the line managers in this study were subjected to forces of bureaucratic and direct control and were vulnerable

to the rationalization and control of attendance. Therefore, the role of line managers is fragmented 'echoing Taylor's notion of 'functional foremanship', as Hales notes (p.54). Clearly, in both countries, line managers were superseded by bureaucratic and technical controls, hence, the absence management process was proceeding without the personal power of the line manager (Edwards, 1979), despite their significant involvement in it.

The discussion on the supervisors' authority over their people responsibilities is a discussion that goes back to the 20th century, when in popular writings on supervision this was a persistent theme, emphasizing the lack of authority to the position (Child and Partridge, 1982; Lowe, 1992; Patten, 1968). Although the classic literature on supervisory, and particular the supervisor's problem, is biased to the manufacturing situation, it is argued here that the traditional 'supervisory problem', which indicates supervisors as being the men in the middle (Child and Partridge, 1982; Lowe, 1992), is not dead but it has just changed its form, and it has been transferred to situations other than manufacturing, such as food retailing.

Indeed, the findings of this research raise discussions similar to other industrial sociologists, who discussed the supervisor's role conflict or as Hirszowicz (1985, p.100) calls it, 'the man in the middle problem'. The latter author has discussed the supervisor as a middle class worker who stands between the labour and the management. Additionally, Roethlisberger (1945) described the foreman as a "master and victim of double talk", specifying the role conflict that these actors had experienced (in Patten, 1968, p.14). This study, similarly to Carter et al. and their research in the Civil service sector, suggests that line managers in services, and particularly those in the food retail sector, are suffering from a role conflict. They are expected to interact on a daily basis with the workers they supervise, and in this case to manage their subordinates absence, and on the other hand, they are part of the management team, receiving orders from their superiors, and experience pressures to act in favour of the management, to control the absence behaviour on the shop floor (Carter et al., 2014; Hirszowicz, 1985). Nonetheless, their role as agents of the capital suffers from role ambiguity and it is subjected to restrictions and direct control by the top management team, leaving them no space to exercise their managerial role. Overall, as Fletcher (1969) puts it, 'the supervisors are the agents of capital...while simultaneously appear to be as much the victims of capital as those they supervise' (in Delbridge and Lowe, 1997, p.409). This research, similarly to Grugulis et al. (2011b) research in UK supermarkets, suggests that bureaucratic forms of control, as well as direct

control, as this research shows, are still strong on the shop floor, demonstrating the increasing limitations and constraints in the line managers' discretion in managing attendance. However, as it is discussed next in this section, line managers, in both countries, did not stay passive to their limited authority, neither to the direct surveillance by their superiors.

In the UK, a black and white approach was adopted towards the formal absence policy and often managers did not perceive absence as a high priority. Not surprisingly, different line managers' perform differently (Townsend, 2014). For example, the night managers in this study perceived the management of attendance as a major distraction, and often shied away from the implementation of the process. Due to the complexity, uncertainty and variability of the former, line managers appeared to get less keen to be involved in this process (Child and Partridge, 1982). Yet, bearing in mind the line managers' excessive workload (Cunningham and Hyman, 1995; Mcguire et al., 2008), it is argued that having extra responsibilities and tasks to deliver, deriving from increased absenteeism, affected negatively their personal performance, and it consequently impacted on their department's performance. Besides, as Goodman and Atkin (1984) propose, when the supervisor spends time to administrative work related to absenteeism management, other productivity activities are not performed. This was also found in this research. Line managers, in all cases, discussed the distractions in their role as a result of their involvement in attendance management. As the research shows line managers, especially night managers, often neglected absence management due to feelings of incompetency or because they do not perceive it as a major problem (Dunn and Wilkinson, 2002) and as Child and Partridge (1982) find, they tended to give less discretion in handling personnel problems and focused more in organizing work activities.

Yet, the HR teams in the two UK cases attempted to control this behaviour and to monitor all line managers' actions. Therefore, this suggests that absence forcibly became a priority (Bevan et al., 2004), whereas line managers were caught within a regime of hierarchical control, regarding their role in managing attendance. The necessity to maintain and manage an absence control process, which was run by line managers, was evident in all cases. Line managers were responsible for this process, while they were required to spend their time on revising work schedules, counselling workers, and monitoring the process of covering.

Nevertheless, line managers in the UK did not stay passive to the direct control from the top, neither acted as ‘robotic conformists’ regarding the delivery of the attendance policy (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000 in Townsend, 2014, p.159). Therefore, the assumption that line managers will implement policies the way that those are designed by the HR is indeed false as other authors have also suggested (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000, Townsend, 2013, p.424). In fact, they developed tactics to cope with the monotony and the repetition of this process, such as devolving part of the process steps to the supervisors (team/section leaders). Additionally, tactics to attain some element of control in the absence management process were evidenced, such as rushing through the meetings, revealing low identification of employees’ personal problems, and showing low empathy to their reason for absence. The fact that the line managers were solely responsible to conduct these meetings enabled them to escape (to a degree) the control by the HR specialists, as the latter actors were not present at the meeting. This confirms authors’ arguments who suggest that line managers have the free will and the capacity to make decisions in their own best interests (Townsend, 2014, p.159). As, this study shows, line managers within the two UK cases did not act as ‘trained gorillas’ (Nichols, 1980) rather they opened a window of opportunity to somehow control and cope with the process. This research suggests two noteworthy outcomes. On one hand, a role conflict was evident through the incompatibility in the expectations towards the behaviour of line managers in their HR role, whereas the intensification of the line managers’ work was obvious in the data, which, though, was clearly subjected to tactics by line managers to take control over these tasks. Grugulis et al. (2011b), report that the freedoms enjoyed by the supermarket managers were minor and illicit [including absence]. They, however, created their small discretionary spaces’ (p.203). This study similarly showed that the line managers’ discretion in managing attendance was indeed limited, yet they have also developed small discretionary spaces to cope with the process.

In Cyprus, as it was already noted, line managers also had limited authority within this process. However, these actors consented to the limited authority within their HR role and the management of absence, whilst they were keen to let absence to the hands of the specialists and/or their superiors and they always pursued the top management’s approval in how to manage absence. This can be explained due to feelings of fear and scapegoating and confirms Renwick’s (2003) argument who suggests that line managers do not perceive themselves as HR experts and are afraid to be criticized for poor performance for not

delivering HR effectively, or even neglecting other demands of their job. Besides, as Edwards and Whitston (1993) find, high absence levels is a bad reflection on the line managers' abilities. Hence, the latter were not willing to take HR responsibilities in order to avoid getting the blame for wrong decisions and therefore consented to the tight control by the senior team. Limited enthusiasm was evident by line managers to take such duties, due to the complexity of the HR work, as well as the role of HR specialists, and store managers in this study, who were policing the line managers actions to ensure the effective management of attendance (Renwick, 2003)

What is interesting in this data, are the actions adopted by line managers to secure high attendance within their departments and, consequently, to secure themselves from being the scapegoat of the management team. Indeed, managers had developed tactics to manage attendance, such as being intolerant of absence, and often pressured employees to attend work, even sick. The latter incident was particularly evident in Cy1, within which managers pressured employees to attend at work sick, whereas employees could not confront this pressure due to the fear of losing their job, the fear of being stigmatized as troublemakers, as well as to avoid a possible reprisal by the managers (Prater and Smith, 2011). The era of austerity and again the feelings of job insecurity of the workforce, allowed managers to flex their muscles and ensure attendance within their teams. Through these practices, line managers were encouraging presenteeism, assuming that attendance equated to performance (Quazi, 2014), whilst coercion was a main approach utilized by line managers to keep absence levels low.

Additionally, line managers utilized micro-politics within their groups to influence the employees' attendance behaviour. Particularly, the formation of cliques and the utilization of gossip, regarding employees' absence, were the main mechanisms used by line managers to manipulate their subordinates' absence behaviour. In both cases, the groups have developed informal hierarchies (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), with line managers being on the lead. Within these groups, the latter were tolerating absence of members of their team and opposed absence of others. In this way, they ensured attendance for those employees who did not belong in their circle, whilst the toleration of their followers' absence was a give-and-take practice, with line managers asking favours back. For example, the leaders of each clique in Cy1 expected their followers to cover overtime in exchange of a more 'relaxed' attitude to their absence requests. Therefore, on one hand line managers adopted a 'I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine' (Ahmad, 2009, p.2)

approach to ensure overtime and the completion of the daily tasks, whilst on the other hand they adopted a punitive approach in the management of absence for those who did not belong in their group. It could be argued that attendance was a matter of persistent negotiation and compromise on the former situation (Edwards and Whitston, 1993) and a matter of intimidation and bullying on the latter. Again, as Burawoy (1979, p.27) puts it, ‘...coercion must be supplemented by the organisation of consent’ and indeed line managers, particularly in Cy1, were adjusting their approach to workplace attendance based on the social relations and the clique membership. The formation of cliques, as an informal system of negotiation, is not a new phenomenon. Authors have indeed discussed this phenomenon within organizations and the managers’ informal activities within the employment relationship. As Dalton (1959) notes, “informal practices are the lubricant of organizational operation” (in Hales, 1989, p.99). This thesis confirms Dalton’s argument and, in line with the triadic model of LPT, suggests that the line managers in Cy1, and to some extent in Cy2, negotiated the shop floor order, and kept the daily business operations going through the formation of cliques and informal practices, building in this way consent and co-operation.

Finally, within this cliquy organization of the shop floor relations, line managers were using gossip to manage attendance, as a mechanism for job insecurity nurturing and coercion to attend. The gossip was evident across the organization, with line managers often reporting employee absence to the top management. Of course, this refers to negative gossip (see Noon and Delbridge, 1993), which generated feelings of insecurity for employees who did not want to be stigmatized as regular absentees, especially in an era of increasing unemployment, and therefore coerced and consented to regular attendance. Through this tactic, line managers attempted to alter accounts of events, such as discouraging absence in general, and at the same time to protect themselves from being criticized for high absence in their departments. As Dalton (1959) argued, the informal practices protect managerial sanity (in Hales, 1989, p.99). Indeed, line managers increased their reputation and transferred the responsibility of absence to the top management (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). This reveals important aspects about the social organization of work. Much of the extant research has discussed gossip as it is expressed by employees and suggested it as a form misbehaviour (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), as a tool of wasting time (Noon and Delbridge, 1993), as a weapon of the weak, or as a line of defence against violations of group-beneficial norms (see Kniffin and Wilson, 2005, p. 280, 288). In this thesis, the discussion on gossip and the cliques reveal the informal

organization of working time, workplace attendance and the informal negotiation for the shop floor order, which is generated by managers. Similar to Gluckman and Pain (in Noon and Delbridge, 1993, p. 28), in this research, gossip within the cliques was used by line managers to regulate and control the attendance behaviour on the shop floor and to align the latter to the managers' expectations. Kurland and Peeled (2000) examine the links between gossip and power, concluding, "Gossip can make a person quite 'large' in an organization" (p.435). Indeed, in this research line managers have utilized gossip, and have informally organized the shop floor in cliques, to gain power over the management of attendance, to influence the employees' behaviour on the shop floor, and to 'get people to do things that they would not otherwise do' as Pfeffer (1993, p.30) notes, such as attending at work sick. In other words, the cliques were the platform for line managers to build consent to attendance, swinging between co-operation and coercion, depending on the employees' identification with particular social groups or their tenure with the organization.

9.5 Revisiting research objectives

The main objectives of this study were described across the chapters of this thesis, stressing the rationale and the problematic for this research. This concluding chapter revisits these objectives and assesses the extent to which these have been met, whereas next it proposes areas of further research.

The objectives of this research were discussed at the beginning of this thesis and were conceptualized across the different chapters, identifying gaps and evaluating theoretical frameworks through the empirical data. Given that this chapter marks the end of this thesis, it is now time to revisit the problematic of the study and the objectives set, to assess the extent to which these have been met.

The first objective was to understand the political, economic, and social structures and dynamics within the grocery retail sector and the changes within this regime in the era of austerity, providing a comparative analysis. The thesis has discussed and scrutinized the characteristics of the food retail job in the two countries, and identified the dynamics that shaped and influenced the work organization in this sector. It discussed the 'Wal-Martization' trend and the similarities in the work organization in the four case studies, suggesting that the 'Wal-Mart effect' was influencing the employment relationship in both countries. By exploring and identifying the main features of the food retail-working regime, the thesis provided a deeper understanding of the sector's political economy

impact on the nature of work, and suggested the supermarket shop floor and the employment relationship as a contested terrain.

The conclusion of the first objective drives the second objective of this research, which aimed to understand how workplace attendance is manifested within the labour process. The thesis has explored how absence was managed in the 'lean' regime of grocery retailing in the UK and Cyprus, and also explored the manifestations of attendance within the labour process. The findings revealed similarities and differences regarding the management of absence across the two countries. In the UK, managers were using a formalized process to manage absence, whereas in Cyprus the latter was a more informal practice. However, despite the (in)formality of the process, all organizations, in both countries, swung between two conflicting approaches to manage absence. The first approach emphasized on the punishment of absence, whereas the second approach aimed the prevention of absence and the built of willing consent through an accommodative approach. Nevertheless, what it is important to recognize is that these approaches, in correlation to the current recession, led to the drop of absence, and increase in presenteeism, mainly due to feelings of job insecurity. Therefore, as the analysis suggested, the engagement in absence, as an expression of resistance, was increasingly muted and employees consented to the shop floor regime and regular patterns of workplace attendance. This leads to the next objective which was to identify and understand what other strategic tactics were used by employees to express their discontent. The analysis has shown that employees, in all cases, utilized more silent and individual actions to express their discontent towards the work organization and the food retail working regime. Nevertheless, consent and conflict co-existed within the labour process. The manifestation of these was strongly depended on the line managers' role within the work-effort bargain and the negotiation of the shop floor order.

Finally, the data have clearly shown the crucial role of line managers within this process. The final objective of the research aimed to examine and understand the role of line managers in the management of absence and workplace attendance, and to explore their level of autonomy in this process. The research highlights key similarities and differences in the role of line managers in managing attendance. In both countries, line managers were involved in absence management, and were subjected to forces of direct and bureaucratic control, holding limited their authority and discretion, while they were solely responsible for the implementation of rules and procedures handed down by the top management.

Nevertheless, as the analysis shows, line managers, in both countries, did not stay inactive to their limited authority, neither to the direct surveillance from the top. In all cases, line managers adopted practices to secure low absence within their departments, as well as to cope with and/or avoid the process of managing absence and attendance.

Overall, it is argued that this thesis has addressed the research objectives set at the beginning, which were to explore the contested nature of the food retail job, to understand the manifestation of absence within the contested employment relationship, and to conceptualize the line managers' role in managing attendance at work. Next the thesis will conclude by discussing areas for further investigation.

9.6 Areas for further investigation

To close this thesis, it is useful to consider some future areas of research and further investigation. In line with the findings of this research, it is necessary to make some more points regarding the weakness of this study and how these could be overcome through further investigation. Additionally, the problematic of this research and the overall investigation raises further questions that stress the necessity for further research.

Firstly, one of the limitations of this research was the limited access in stores and specifically in smaller stores of the four organizations. Therefore, further research in more stores, at different sizes, will provide a more detailed insight regarding the problematic of this research. To explain more, through this proposal the research will investigate the dynamics of the nature of work on shop floors with different sizes, will identify the dynamics within the employment relationship and will provide a better insight regarding the consistency across the organizations and whether the size of the store is a variable that can affect the work organization and/or the informality of working time organization. It is expected that in smaller stores, such as store2/Cy1, the micro-politics affect both the work organization as well as the management of attendance. The thesis failed to identify these issues within the big stores examined and it would be interesting to examine whether line managers adjust their managerial style and their involvement in absence management depending on the store size, perhaps because of a closer relationship with the employees.

A second area for further research relates to the international comparison. This research took place in an era of austerity and focused on two European countries with similar IR systems that both suffered the recession, yet on a different density. The research has identified issues regarding the organization of working time and the utilization of absence as a form of resistance, with employees exhibiting job insecurity and fear to go absent.

Consequently, presenteeism is a major outcome of the recession and the feelings of job insecurity. Nevertheless, UK and Cyprus are just a few of the countries that experience the impact of recession. Further research could provide interesting insights regarding the organization of working time in food retailing and the conflict within the workplace in an era of economic crisis. For example, European data report similar measures between Greece and Cyprus regarding working time organization, such as the extension of opening hours for retailing to tackle the highly increasing unemployment. However, our knowledge is limited how food retail work is organized in this country and what is the impact of the recession on workplace attendance. A similar case is Spain, where unemployment is reaching record levels in the country and it has the highest youth unemployment across Europe (Eurofound, 2013). Thus, further cross-national analysis, especially within countries that suffer massively due to the economic crisis, and have different regulatory and IR systems, is necessary to understand the changing dynamics within the employment relationship and to understand attendance as part of the labour process.

Finally, it is suggested that a cross-sectoral analysis is necessary to understand what happens in other sectors beyond food retailing. The lean regime of the retail sector is well recognized by authors and researchers have examined extensively the job characteristics and the impact on employment. However, limited research has discussed working time as a contested terrain within retail in general. One interesting case study would be telecommunications companies, who, although they operate on a high street, and are undeniably involved in a price war, it would be interesting to examine whether this different type of service shows different dynamics within the employment relationship. The intangible sophisticated service within telecommunications and the lean working regime are unexplored dynamics within labour research. Additionally, as this thesis showed, working time is a contested terrain and employees are silently expressing their discontent, whilst at the same time consent emerges. What happens though in industries in which operations are stringy timed and how attendance is manifested in the labour process is still an underexplored area. For example, the delivery/courier industry, which bases its competitive advantage on speed of service, is an interesting case to examine these issues and to understand both the working time organization in such a competitive and strict in time service, as well as to explore how employees manifest their attendance. Additionally, this thesis suggests that this problematic (attendance at work) and the manifestation of attendance within the labour process are important to be explored in industries away from the high street and the sphere of retailing. One interesting case study is the industry of oil

and gas. The recent reduction of the oil price (Kerr in FT, 21/1/212015), has generated a wave of cutbacks and redundancies in the industry within the UK since 2009, whilst a recent report suggests, “dexterity and adherent cost control are required for overall profitability” (Tholons, 2007, p.3). Understandably, this industry is transformed, stepping towards into a leaner organization of work in order to survive in the competitive market of oil and gas. However, limited research has examined the labour process within this sector, and the impact of the changing lean regime on workplace attendance and its manifestation within the former.

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Appendix: The Interview Guides

HR Manager Interview

HR Issues and Absence

- How long have you been working in Retail?
- How did the nature of the food retail sector affect your decisions as HR manager? For example, the competitive pressures and the price war (low cost war) impacted on your decisions? How?
- Did you have any contact with HR managers in other supermarkets? If yes: Do you know if they face similar problems as you did? We know that turnover is a problem. Other common problems? Why? - No contact: Why? High competitiveness?
- What are the most demanding pressures you faced in retail? Cost?
- Do you think you would manage people differently in a different sector?
- what is different in retail
- What are the key HR issues that the retail organisation faces? Are these universal to all retail organizations? Yes: why? No: how they are different?
- What were the most challenging issues you faced during your tenure as an HR Manager in Retail?
- Where does absence fit within these HR issues? [Probe for an overview of absence management – has it always been a problem?

Absenteeism (Definition/ Reasons/ Level of absence)

- What is your definition for absenteeism?
- What is the **level** of absence in the organization? Why to that level?
- Is absence considered a **problem for your organisation**? If so why? Try to get a sense absences have got out of hand
- What do you see as the main causes of absence? (Family problems/Sickness/Personal problems/ Social obligations /**Work-related Problems? PROBE - Resistance**) Does this vary by staff group? Reasons? What about FLEs?
- Are there **differences** to absence levels **among different stores**? Why? Is store/LM's management style a reason for that?

Absence Management: A responsibility – problem and for whom?

- Who do you think should have the ultimate **responsibility for managing** absenteeism? What really happens in the organization?
- How would you describe your organisations approach to managing absence?
- Is managing absence seen as a **priority** at senior management/ LM level? Do you set **targets**? Is the reduction of absenteeism, a key goal for the organization?
- How much of your **time** is spent on the management of absence and attendance issues?
- Do you think that absence is well managed in your organisation?
- How do you manage absenteeism? What actions are taken? (Link to **policy**)

Policy

- Is there an absence policy established?
- Who decided for the establishment of the policy? What was your role? Centralized or different in countries/areas/stores?
- Has the absence **policy changed** in recent years? Probe for old/new policy. Is there more emphasis on LMs involvement in the process? Is more **tightly** and robustly managed than before? **Changes over time**?
- Does this **policy include** the roles and **responsibilities of** staff/LMs?
- How is **absence reported**, for example, on the first day of absence does the employee contact HR or their Line Manager?
- What happens then?
- What is **LMs' role in the policy**? (keep records/discipline etc the absence and how? At a store level?)
- Is this process **consistent**? **The same in all stores**?

Management Information

- What kind of information is reported to Senior Management?
- Can **trends** be identified and is benchmarking undertaken in comparison to other sectors?
- Do the reports **benchmark departmental** absences throughout the year?
- How can a company keep their employee absence rates low?
- What do you think is **your (HR) role** in **reducing** employees absence?

Line Managers Involvement in absence management

- In what degree do LMs are involved in HR? What are their main **responsibilities**?

- Is absence management one of their HR **duties**?

If not

- Why?, Should it be?, What's the impact on efficient HR and absence management?

If yes

- What are the **key issues** around line managers managing absence?

- Do you feel that line managers follow procedures to manage absence? If not what are the challenges face in doing so?

- Do they have the necessary **competences** in HR/absence management?

- They are aware and able to follow such a policy What kind of training

- Have they received adequate **training** to manage absence? how was that communicated to them?

- What kind of **support** is provided to them? Could any **improvements** be made to the way line managements are supported in managing long-term absence?

- Do you **trust** them to manage absence?

- Is their involvement positive for the organization?

- **Guide** them? In what way?

- What about the **stores located away** from the Head.Office? How is the communication implemented?

- How do you **monitor the** effective application of absence policy?

- What is your role in absence management? Is there a **formal** point at which **HR is brought** in?

- Do you give them the **autonomy and authority** to handle and take decisions for their people issues (absence)?

Employees Views

How do you think absence is regarded amongst the workforce? [probe for pressures, morale of colleagues, reasons for absence]

What measures have been taken to communicate the policy on absence? Do you think **employees understand** the policy?

Do you feel that absent **employees comply** with company procedures regarding absence? If not then why not? [probe for views on genuine/non-genuine absence]

If line manager is **key** to managing absence, how is this **received by the workforce**?

LMs interview

Introduction Personal Data of the Interviewee

- **Name/Gender/Age/** Educational background?
- How long you've been working as a FLM? How long in this organization?
(tenure)
- What did you do **before** become a line manager?
- Have you supervised people before? (experience)
- How many people are in your department?
- What is your team's average education level?

Department overview role and work organisation

- Can you describe me a day in the organization? (responsibilities, schedule, people interacting with) [probe for **changes** over the last 3 years in terms of **span of control**, your own **workload** in terms of **responsibility**, volume and pace of work]
- Can you talk me through the **operations** within your department? [probe for changes in the last 3 years in terms of **increased pressures**, **pace/volume of work**, staffing levels, **targets**]

General

- What makes someone a good supervisor?
- Describe your management style.
- How do you measure success as a supervisor?
- How do you handle employee issues

Current situation regarding HR issues

- How much **time** do **you spend** on HR responsibilities?
- **What kind** of HR responsibilities?
- How much time are you **willing to spend** on HR?
- Does **anybody else supervise** your employees? Is that helpful? (**interventions**)
- **Why** using HR practices? Do you like it? Why? Reasons for not using HR practices:
 - Is HR included in your **job description**?
 - Is anything hindering you from implementing HR? Example?

HRM Practices Implementation

- Where do the HR practices used in to line **emerging from** (HR manager)?
- Do you know what is **expected** from you in HR?
- Are any **guidelines/support** provided? From whom? If not Do you need any ?
- How do you plan your day? What is your **priority**? Department and business issues or HR issues?Why?Example?
- Do you **participate in HR policy development**? How?- Do you think you should?

Ability

- Do you feel you have enough HR **knowledge/skills** for using HR practices?
 - Did you receive any HR **training**?
- If yes... was it **adequate**?
- If not. do you need any? **What kind** of training could be useful?
- Do you require any **support** for delivering HR?
 - Who do you ask for support?

Absenteeism

- What is your **definition** of absenteeism?
- Who do you think has ultimate **responsibility** for managing absenteeism?
- What are the absenteeism rates in your area?
- What are the various **reasons** for employee absence?
- Do you feel that absent employees comply with company procedures regarding absence? If not then why not? [probe for views on genuine/non-genuine absence]
- What according to you are the **causes** of employee absence for the organization?Is it a problem? Does absence impact on the operational effectiveness of your department? If so in what ways?
- What initial **steps** can be taken to **reduce** absence?
- Is the reduction of absenteeism, a key **goal** for the organization?
- Is this objective had been **communicated** to you? Are targets set and how is this monitored?
- What do you think is **your role** in reducing employees absence rates?

- What do you think **should change** in order to reduce absence/encourage attendance in your department?
- Do you feel you have the **time** to manage absence effectively?
- Do you have the **managerial authority** to manage absence?
- **If yes...** How do you manage absenteeism? What actions are taken?
Do you receive adequate **support** by your superiors? By whom? (HR, store manager?)
Is this support effective? Could this be improved?
- **If not...** Would you like to have higher authority in managing absence?
• Do you feel equipped and skilled to manage absence? (limits to discretion, given sufficient information, training)

Training needs?

- Do your superiors **intervene** in your job? And specifically in your role to manage people?
How do you **feel** for that? What would you like to change?

Policy

- Is there an absence **policy** ?
- Are you **familiar** with that policy? Is defined by whom? How the policy principles are **communicated** to you?
- Please can you explain what **your role** is within the organisations policy on absence? Has this role **changed**? If so in what ways?
- Do you **record** absence? Who records absence and how (IT , paperwork?)

Vignettes

- Over the last three years can you think of examples where:
 - a) Absence has been successfully managed
 - b) You have experienced difficulties in handling absence

Concluding views

- What do you see as the most **effective methods** for managing absence?
- What do you see as the **barriers** – internal and external – to managing absence more effectively?

Employee interview

The Job

- What is your opinion for your job (Heavy work load//Long hours of work/Poor working climate/stressful?) (**job characteristics**)
- Is your work **monotonous**?
- Are you happy/ **satisfied** with your work?
- How is your **work environment**? (Relationship with colleagues/ Line Managers/ customers)
- Can you (work-life) **balance** your personal life with your professional life? Do you have the chance to do that? How? Enough leave days? Opportunity to be off every time you request it? (work-life **balance**)
#if not... what do you need more? More leave days

Absence

Reasons for absence

- How **often** do you take leave in a month?
 - When was the **last time** you was absent from your work? For what **reason**?
 - What are the three **most important reasons** for going absent?
 - Are poor **working conditions** a reason to go absent?
 - Are your **job characteristics** a reason to go absent?
 - In what degree your **supervisor affects** your decision to go absent? Why?
 - Do you feel **pressured/angry/annoyed** when you are on the same shift with particular persons (supervisor/colleagues)? Would that be a **reason not to attend** to work?
 - Do you think that a better **leadership-support** by your supervisor would encourage you not to go absent?
 - Which factor will **motivate you to attend** regularly?
- Good employer relations/Work environment/Future prospects/Recognition of work/ Incentives and bonus provided based on performance

Absence Management

- Have you perceived a greater increase of **managerial interest** in absence? If so can you explain why there has been greater emphasis? [probe for views on legitimacy]
- How does your organization **manage absenteeism**?

- Did you have **concerns** about how you were treated for deciding to go absent? Does this make you worry about your LM attitude against you? Worry for going absent again in the future?
- Can you describe the **general attitude** and behaviour of **your LM** when you were off? (discipline, pressure to return, or they accept the reason for going absent)

Authority to manage absence

- Who has the main **responsibility** to manage absence in your department?
- Is there an applied absence **policy**? Are you **aware/familiar** with it?
- Who is the first person to **contact** when going absent?
- Who do you think **should be responsible** for managing absence? Why?
- Do you think if one employee goes absent has negative impact on the organization/department/colleagues/LMs? In what way? (In your opinion, Should absenteeism be **controlled**? By Whom? **Is it a problem**? Why?)

Support by Line Manager

- Did you feel that you received the right type of support/advice when you were off? Examples?

Relationship with superior

- How do you rate your **relationship with** your superior? What are the negatives or positive aspects of this relationship? How it can be improved?

Communication

- When appropriate, does your supervisor **ask** how you feel about things that affect you?.
- Does your supervisor effectively **communicate** organizational goals and objectives?
- Does your supervisor makes the **workplace pleasant** and safe
- What does your boss/supervisor do to keep your moral high?

Authority

- Does your supervisor encourage you to take appropriate action without waiting for approval or review?
- Do you see your supervisor as a legitimate source of authority?
- Do you see him/her as a strong managerial figure?
- Does he/she have the knowledge/skills/freedom to manage people?

Absence Management

- Does he/she try to encourage you to attend regularly?
- Does he/she show empathy to your personal problems and your need to go absent?

Concluding Views

- What suggestions do you have for your supervisor that would help him/her be a more effective manager?
- What suggestions do you have for him/her to help him manage absence more effectively?