



About carrier paths, work culture and  
work-life balance

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Breaking Barriers in **Science** Workshop



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You don't have to live like  
everybody else.  
In fact, you'll probably be  
happier if you don't.

JOSHUA BECKER

THE SIMPLICITY HABIT



## My carrier path



High Tatras, Slovakia

Charles University  
Quantum optics and optoelectronics  
2007 – Masters in Physics  
Moved to London to do a PhD



Imperial College London  
High power lasers and attosecond science  
2011 – PhD in Physics



2011 wedding



2011 – 2014 Postdoc at FzU – Department of nanostructures



Since 2011 – at ELI Beamlines





Since 2011 at ELI Beamlines

### Carrier breaks

2013  
Martina  
16 months leave



2015  
Karel  
13 months leave





## Carrier breaks

2021  
Lenka  
28 weeks leave



Since 2011 at ELI Beamlines

## We need:

- Legal structures
- Support / system
- Supportive culture and environment





## EU Work-life balance directive (2019)

### Aims

- Supporting a work-life balance for parents
- Encouraging a more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women
- Addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market



### Legislative actions

- Paternity leave – at least 10 working days for fathers
- Parental leave – 2 months non-transferable from a parent to another
- Carers' leave for workers providing personal care
- Flexible working arrangements to all working parents of children up to at least 8 years old



“We need to treat people as people and not only as a workforce”

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>

Marian Harkin, MEP

## Czech law

- Maternity leave – 28 weeks, after child birth
- Paternity leave – 14 days, to be taken within 6 weeks after child birth
- Parental leave – for either of the parent for a period of choice of the parent, maximum up to the age of 3 of the child
- Shared caring leave



“The degree of flexibility of parental leave is already considerable. It fully respects the parents' freedom to decide how, when and who will take care of the child.”

Ministry of labour and social affairs, Heroine 2/2024

“So, where is the problem?”

## Parental leave – theory and practice

- According to law, parents can share the parental leave
- In 2023, only **2%** are parents on parental leave are **fathers** (it was 1% in 2004)

<https://www.mpsv.cz/vybrane-statisticke-udaje>



“The degree of flexibility of parental leave is already considerable. It fully respects the parents' freedom to decide how, when and who will take care of the child.”

Ministry of labour and social affairs, Heroine 2/2024

“Why has your wife not applied for parental benefits?”

Call from the Office

## It is the system

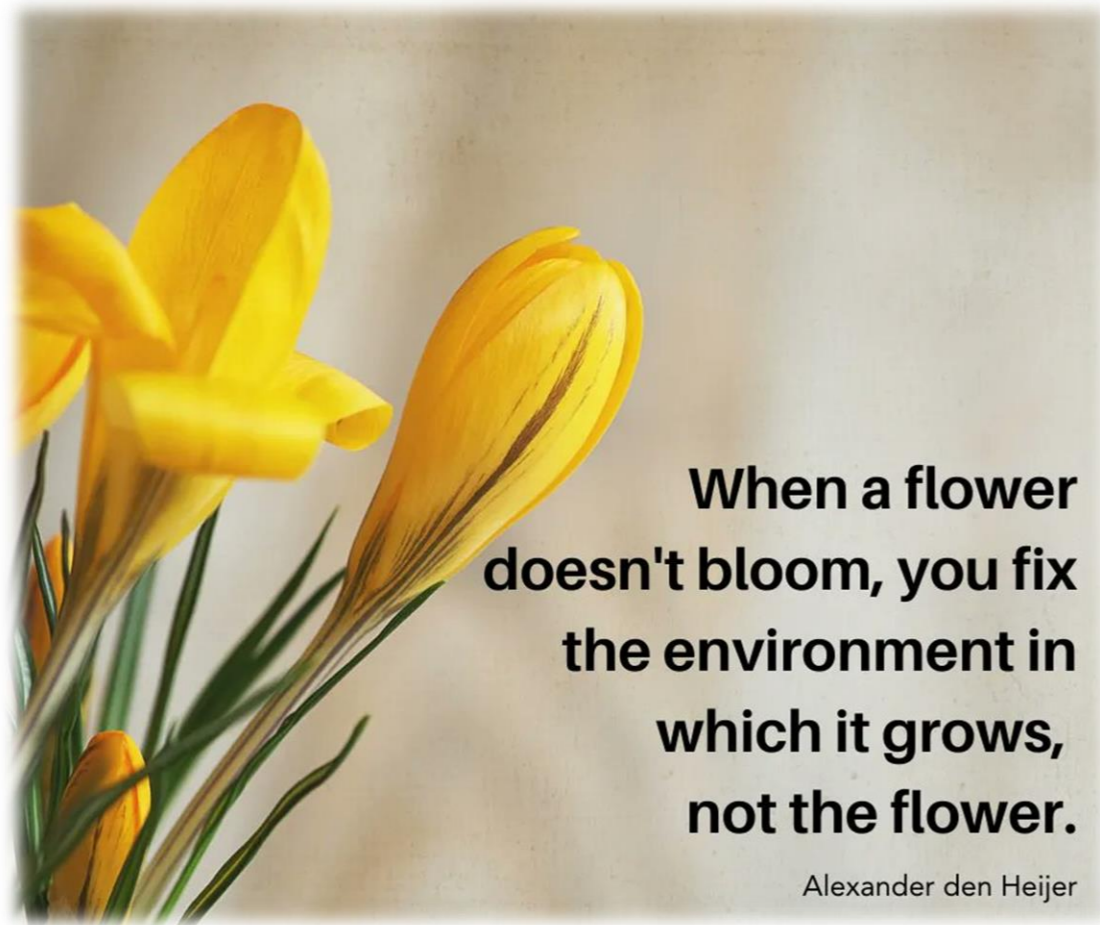
- Very few daycares for children under the age of 3, often very expensive
- Limited places in kindergartens
- Not much practical support for fathers, or flexible arrangements



## ... and the culture

- In Czech Republic : a strong pressure for women to stay at home with kids
- Often not enough support from family, relatives, colleagues
- "only mothers can take care about small children, they should stay at home for 3 years"

## The need for supportive culture



- We need to create a supportive and inclusive environment
- Maintaining a healthy work-life balance and gender equality brings benefits to both the employees and the employer



## What is needed for parents:

1. Flexible working arrangements :
  - part-time work
  - home-office
  - online / hybrid meetings
2. Support with childcare :
  - Possibility to bring child to work occasionally – Kid's room
  - Shared parental leave / caring leave; support fathers to take the leave
  - Daycare possibilities for parents with small children
  - Financial support to cover daycare cost
  - Summer activities for children
3. To be respected



## 1. Flexible (family friendly) arrangements in practice:

- Part-time work for parents of small children, both for men and women
- Respect family responsibilities : e.g. that a parent cannot come early due to kindergarten / school organization
- Flexible working hours
- Do not organize events for parents/women late afternoon (4 pm)
- Support hybrid / online meetings
- Do not celebrate long working hours / weekend work



## 2. Childcare:

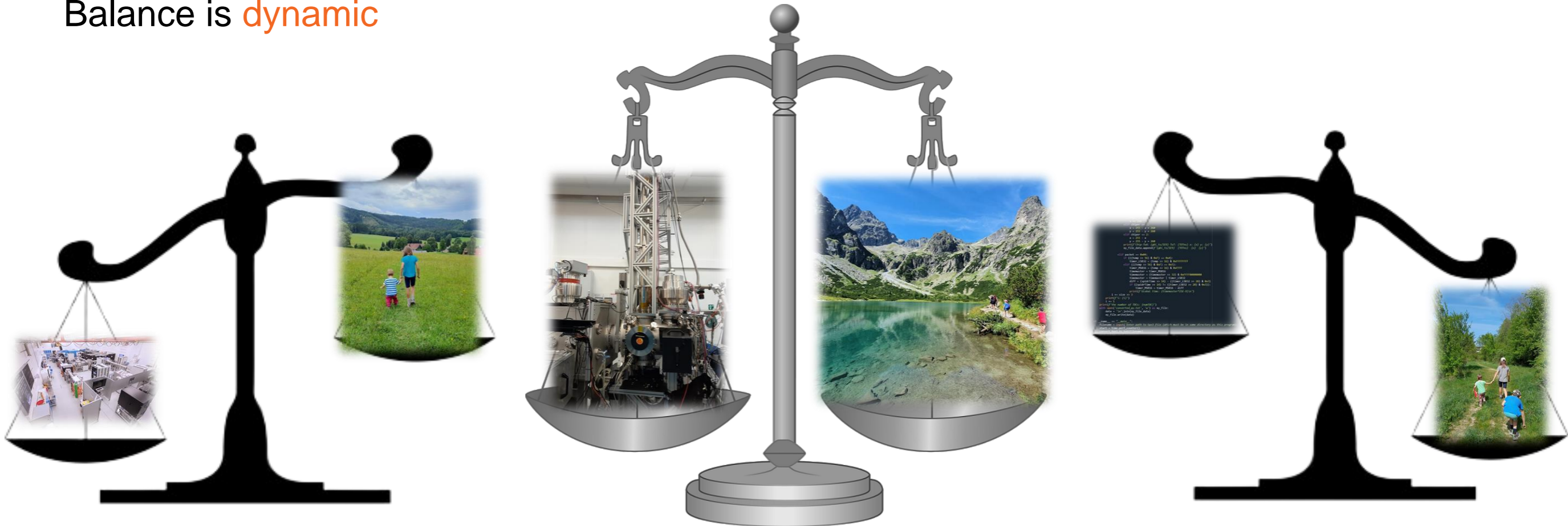
- Possibility to bring child to work occasionally – Kid's room
- Daycare
- Financial support – the price of private daycare is about an order of magnitude larger than a private one
- Children summer activities at workplace



- Support **fathers** to take parental leave / caring leave, no negative comments
- Part time contracts for men
- Role models : include men that have families



Balance is **dynamic**



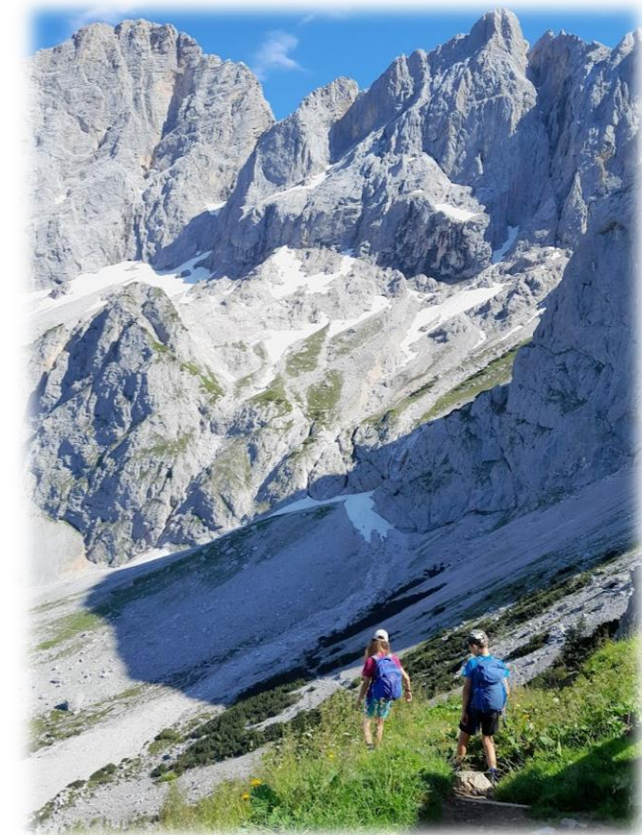
## Balance three things: carrier, family / relationships, hobbies

- Scientific carrier can be very intensive, but it is necessary to switch to hobbies and family
- Say no at work. Although it is not easy.
- Prioritize
- What I do :
  - No email / webex notifications on the phone (in fact I normally have data/wifi switched off)
  - No work during weekends (OK, I do not consider reading scientific papers as work)



## Take vacation

- I do not carry laptop to vacation (I did it twice and never had time to open it, it just made my luggage heavier)
- Use automatic reply
- I do not accept a deadline during a vacation

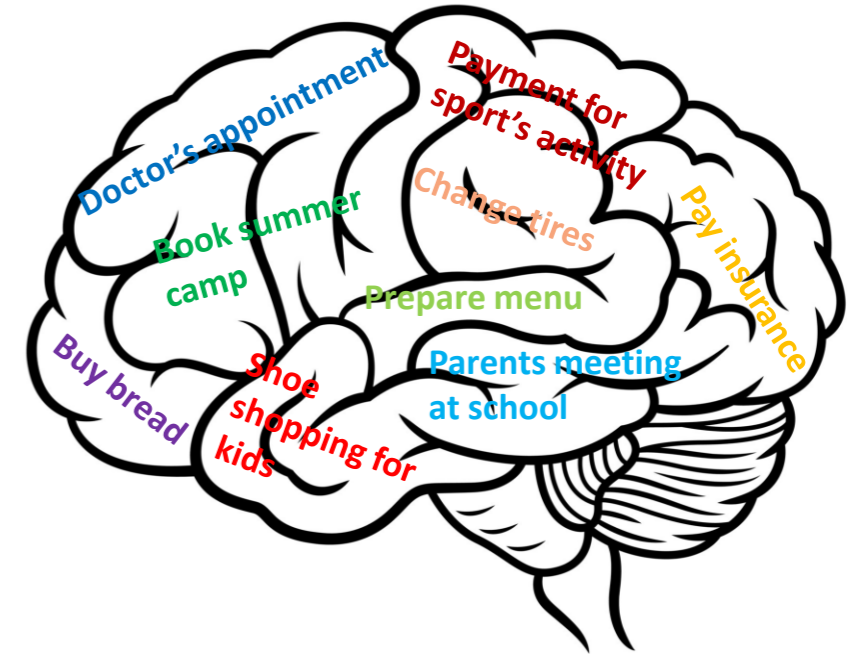


## Keep the household running

- Share childcare, ideally 50/50
- Share domestic chores in a way that is ok for all, not necessarily 50/50 for all work, but somehow on the whole
- Realize the amount of mental load and share it

## Hobbies

- Find time for hobbies : I cycle to work, this is my free time
- Involve children in hobbies





Thank you for your attention!

