Happy Homes and Productive Workplaces

Summary Report of research findings

A full report and this summary report are available online at OnePlusOne.org.uk and WorkingFamilies.org.uk

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working families
changing the way we live and work

oneplusone
Strengthening relationships

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Foreword

Given the current economic difficulties, with increasing global competition, downsizings, long hours cultures, intrinsic job insecurity and a more robust, bottom-line management style, the work-life balance agenda has never been more important.

In the midst of this environment, now is the time to focus on - rather than ignore - the impacts that work and home can have on each other. OnePlusOne and Working Families' 'Happy Homes, Productive Workplaces' research is paramount to: tackling the pressures and strains being experienced by British organisations, individuals, couples and families; and also to highlighting the mutually positive benefits that a healthy dynamic between work and home-life can bring.

In order that we help working families and organisations develop strategies to deal with the multiple demands on employees and their personal relationships, and make Britain a more productive and competitive country, it is necessary to explore the factors that affect quality of work and non-work life.

It is critical though not only to increase our understanding of how stresses at work and home are caused, but how they can crossover and impact one another. The evidence is mounting that support for individuals and families enhances both employee and organisational wellbeing. It is then vital to devise and implement policies to enable employees to have healthy, functional personal relationships, and be fully engaged at work.

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Introduction

Undertaken collaboratively by OnePlusOne and Working Families, this study is intended to increase understanding about **the connection between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement**.

This **summary report** forms an essential component in stimulating discussion between researchers, **employers and employees**, in order to **generate policies and practices** that are beneficial to all concerned. A **full report** and this **summary report** are available at **OnePlusOne.org.uk and WorkingFamilies.org.uk**.

At the outset, it is important to define the core terms used in this study. **Relationship Quality** is defined as a person's perception of the quality of their romantic relationship[1][2]. Further, **Work Engagement** is defined as: a positive work-related state of fulfilment that is characterised by **'vigour, dedication, and absorption'**[3].

A series of relationship-centric, work-centric and socio-demographic factors were also examined to see if they were independently associated with both Relationship Quality and Work Engagement.
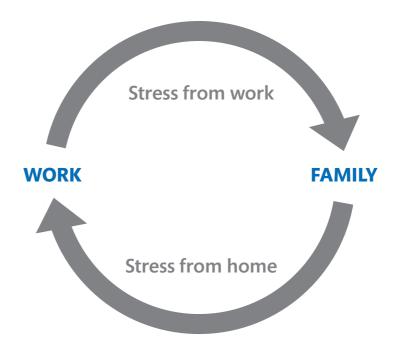
Context

This research has been undertaken in a climate of increasing political, organisational and personal awareness of the benefits of successfully integrating work and family life. For example, in addition to the Working Time Regulation Act in 1998, prominent measures enacted in the past decade include the legal right to request flexible working patterns for parents with children under the age of six in 2003 (or for parents with disabled children up to the age of 18). This has been extended to all parents with children under the age of 17 in 2009. It is further expected that this right to request flexible working may well be extended to all employees before the end of the current parliament.

Further, in 2010, Sir Michael Marmot, in reviewing ways to reduce health inequalities in England, recognised the importance of flexible working practices for those with young children and the general importance of *"...the flexibility to enable people to balance work and family life"*[4].

The association between Relationship Quality and well-being is now recognised as unequivocal. This is especially pertinent at a time of increased divorce rates (generally, since the 1970s) and declining marriage rates; increased projections of the proportion of marriages likely to end in divorce (recent estimates of 45%); increased likelihood of cohabiting relationships breaking down compared to those married; and subsequent increases in the number of children experiencing the separation of their parents.

Recent research has also acknowledged how family and work-life interact with each other in a number of ways. For example, one area of research focuses on what is commonly referred to as Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life, through work stress etc.), and Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life, through family stress etc.). As shown below, both occur bi-directionally, as the demands or pressures associated with each area of life can be incompatible with the other, creating the potential for a vicious-cycle. Moreover, a number of studies have found a negative link between Work-Family Conflict and family satisfaction, and satisfaction in a couple relationship.

Finally, researchers have begun to argue that the interface between work and family may not be purely negative, but that work and family life may benefit one another, a term described, among others, as Work-Family Enrichment or Family-Work Enrichment. In relation, the substantial Whitehall II[5] longitudinal cohort study notes how the support from family and friends can act as a powerful buffer against some of life's difficulties including work stress.

Within this context, **never has there been a more appropriate time to conduct research into** *Happy Homes and Productive Workplaces*.

Stress from work

WORK   FAMILY

Stress from home

1 Fincham, F.D. & Rogge, R. (2010), 'Understanding Relationship Quality: Theoretical Challenges and New Tools for Assessment, *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 2(4): 227-242.'

2 Hirshberger, G., Srivastava, S., Marsh, P., Cowan, C.P. & Cowan P.A. (2009), 'Attachment, marital satisfaction, and divorce during the first fifteen years of parenthood', *Personal Relationships*, 16, 401-420.

3 Schaufeli, W.B., Bakker, A.B. & Salanova, J.I. (2006), 'The Measurement of Work Engagement With a Short Questionnaire: A Cross-National Study', *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 66 (4), 701-716.

4 Marmot, M., Atkinson, T. & Bell, J. (2010), *The Marmot Review: Fair Society, Healthy Lives*. Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010, (p111).

5 Ferrie, J.E. (ed.), (2004), *Work Stress and Health: The Whitehall II study*, accessed 28th May, 2012, from http://www.ucl.ac.uk/whitehallII/pdf/Whitehallbooklet_1_.pdf
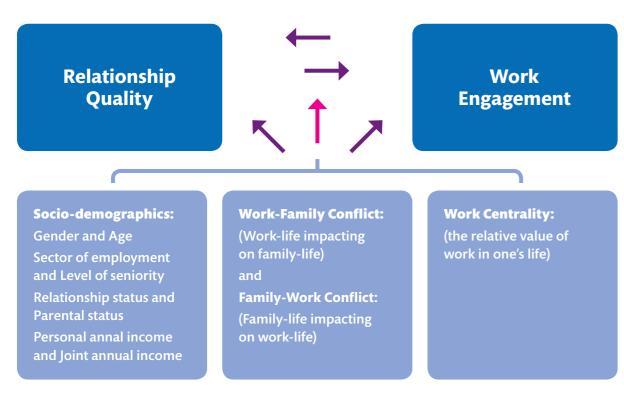
Research overview

The overall **aim** of the project is to discover if there is **a connection between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement**. In order to achieve this, **four main research questions** were considered:

1 **Are Relationship Quality and Work Engagement predicted by perceptions of Work Centrality** (the relative value of work in one's life) **and additional work-centric factors** (Level of seniority, Level of annual income, and Sector of employment)?

2 **Are Relationship Quality and Work Engagement predicted by perceptions of Work-Family Conflict** (work-life impacting on family-life) and **Family-Work Conflict** (family-life impacting on work-life)?

3 **Are Relationship Quality and Work Engagement predicted by key socio-demographic and relationship-centric factors** (Gender, Age, Relationship-status and Parental-status)?

4 (Subject to reporting an association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement) **Do any of the above influence the strength of the association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement?**

The research aim and questions are presented in Figure I:

Figure I: Theoretical model for the Happy Homes, Productive Workplaces survey

KEY

→ **Hierarchical regression:** testing the moderating influence on the association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement.

→ **Standard regression:** testing the predicitive influences of variables on Relationship Quality and Work Engagement separately.

Methodology

A 45 question, cross-sectional **survey** questionnaire was designed, piloted and administered to address the aim and research questions. The survey utilised a series of **'scales'**, sets of validated questions that provide a reliable and accurate **measure** of respondents': *Relationship Quality, Work Engagement, Work-Family Conflict* (work-life impacting on family-life), *Family-Work Conflict* (family-life impacting on work-life), and *Work Centrality* (the relative value of work in one's life).

The scales were supplemented by additional work-centric, relationship-centric and socio-demographic questions, and three open-ended questions asking how personal relationships and work impact on each other. A contextualising **literature review and qualitative findings** are provided in the **full report**, available on the Working Families and OnePlusOne websites.

The survey was distributed through known employers, as well as through a number of websites of work and family-oriented organisations. Using SPSS, the data were subject to descriptive statistics (frequencies, means and mean differences) and multiple and hierarchical regression analyses.

The survey was launched online, and ran throughout February, 2012, and received **2027 responses**.

Summary of respondent profile

The majority of respondents were female, based in London or the South East of the UK, working in the Private sector, and earning mid or high levels of income. Most were in a serious relationship, with children.

- **74.4%** were female, **68.5%** were in their 30s or 40s, and **57.1%** were based in either London or the South East

- **97.7%** were in work, **58.6%** of whom in the Private sector, with **54.3%** at a Mid-level of seniority

- **75.4%** worked full-time, and **34.2%** were responsible for line-managing others

- **58.7%** were married or in a Civil Partnership, and **19.8%** were co-habiting

- **63.1%** had children

- **28.4%** had a mid-level personal annual income between £30,000 and £49,999, and **24.4%** had a high personal annual income of £50,000 or over

- **60.7%** of those in a relationship had a joint annual income level of £50,000 or over

As a result, the sample provides great insight into the work and family lives of a widespread demographic, but is not necessarily representative of the entire UK population.

2 Findings: How work is organised

This section reports **how work is organised for the majority of respondents**. Unless specified otherwise, all % are presented as a proportion of those in work.

Access to and use of flexible working practices

Key finding: **63.6%** of respondents **work flexibly** in some way, with access to at least one form of flexible working [compared to 73.5% of UK employees[6]].

The **most commonly used** form of flexible working is **flexible-time** (able to vary when work is done), used by **42.9%** [compared to 49% of the UK working population[7]]; followed by spatial flexibility (able to vary where work is done), used by 26.4% [compared to 44% of the UK working population[8]].

Lack of access to and use of flexible working practices

Key finding: **36.4%** of respondents **do not work flexibly** at all.

For the respondents who do not work flexibly, the reasons can be broadly categorised as either consequences of their own choice or of their work circumstances.

Respondents were asked to 'Tick all that apply', resulting in the potential for an individual to register multiple answers depending on circumstance.

For respondents who do not work flexibly as a consequence of **their own choice**:

- **22.9%** have not previously considered it
- **17.0%** have never wanted to
- **1.1%** have recently stopped though choice

For respondents who do not work flexibly as a consequence of **their work circumstances**:

- **38.4%** report that the nature of their job would not permit it
- **15.2%** reported it would damage their future job prospects
- **9.7%** had a request denied by their employer
- **4.1%** were recently informed by their employer that they were unable to continue working flexibly

Discrepancies between number of hours contracted and worked

Key Finding: On average, both **full-time** and **part-time** employees **worked more** than their contracted hours each week.

1818 respondents had contracted hours at work. Of these:

- **Full-time employees** on average were *contracted* to work 36.6 hours and *actually* worked 39.9 hours per week: an **extra of 3.3 hours** (a 9.0% increase).

- **Part-time employees** on average were *contracted* to work 24.4 hours and *actually* worked 26.4 hours per week, an **extra of 2.0 hours** (an 8.2% increase).

Whilst an average over-work of 9.0% for full-time and 8.2% for part-time respondents may not seem too dramatic, these figures are derived from averages across the data set which can mask the experiences of particular groups of individuals. Further analysis below shows that there is **a general trend that the more hours you are contracted to work, the more you are likely to work**.

The trend for over-working

Figure II, right, shows the general discrepancies between hours worked and contracted by numbers of hours. **Ideally, the numbers of people contracted to and actually working each set of hours per week should be equal**, as this would suggest respondents are meeting their contractual obligations, and are neither over- nor under-working. If this were the case, the purple and blue portions of each column, which compare hours worked and contracted, would meet at the mid-point.

- Notably, **the numbers of respondents** contracted to and actually working **'Up to 20'** and **'21-34' hours per week** (likely to be part-time positions) **are roughly equivalent**. This shows that a very similar number of people who are contracted to work these hours actually do so.

- However, there are **far more respondents contracted** to work **'35-40' hours** per week **than actually** report **doing so** (a difference of 513 people). As the numbers of respondents contracted to and actually working fewer (part-time) hours are very similar, this suggests that **the large number of people** (513) **who are contracted to work '35-40' hours** per week but are not doing so **are working more**.

- This is supported by the **small numbers of respondents** who are *contracted* to work **'41-48'**, **'49-59'**, and **'60+'** hours per week, but the **much higher numbers of people who actually** work this many hours.

It must be noted that these findings are estimates of trends. As respondents were asked separately how many hours they are **contracted to** and **actually work**, it is not possible to say definitively that particular individuals are under- or over-working their contracted hours.

Figure II: Discrepancies between numbers of hours contracted and worked

Up to 20 hours per week

| 98 | 78 |

Between 21 and 34 hours per week

| 331 | 301 |

Between 35 and 40 hours per week

| 1328 | 815 |

Between 41 and 48 hours per week

| 46 | 429 |

Between 49 and 59 hours per week

| 9 | 153 |

60+ hours per week

| 6 | 42 |

KEY ▮ Number or respondents contracted to work these hours.
▮ Number or respondents actually working these hours.

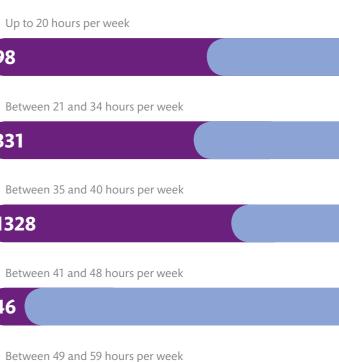6 CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) (2012), *Flexible Working Provision and Uptake*, London: CIPD.

7 DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) (2006), *The Third Work-Life Balance Employees' Survey: Executive Summary*, London: DTI.

8 Ibid.

Absenteeism and Presenteeism

Key finding: **64.6%** of respondents had **attended work whilst ill** in the past 12 months. The most common reported reason was **'my work just had to be done'**.

Absenteeism

The mean **average** number of reported **days missed from work** due to illness in the past 12 months was **3.3** [compared to an average rate of absence across the UK of 6.5 days per employee[9]].
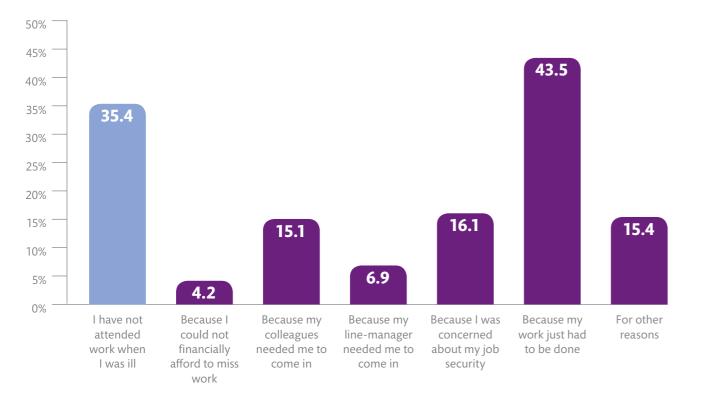
Furthermore, **47.1%** of respondents had **missed between one and five days** in the past 12 months, and **34.0%** had **not missed any days**.

Presenteeism

64.6% of respondents had **attended work whilst ill** (presenteeism) in the past 12 months. The reasons for this presenteeism can be broadly categorised as relating to either the individual themselves (the pressures of workload, job security or money), or to others at work (the needs of work colleagues or a line-manager).

The distribution of reported reasons for this presenteeism is shown below in Figure III. Respondents were asked to 'Tick all that apply', resulting in the potential for an individual to register multiple answers depending on circumstance.

Figure III: Reported reasons for presenteeism

Time taken away from work for main-meal break

Key finding: **66.9%** of respondents **stop** work for **30 minutes or less** for their main meal break.

The average amount of time taken for a **lunch-break** (or other main meal) away from work was **26.9 minutes**.

8.3% of respondents, on average, **do not stop working at all** whilst eating lunch (or other main meal).

Of those that do stop work during their lunch-break (or other main meal): **14.0%** stop for **10 minutes or less**, and **37.3%** stop for **20 minutes or less**.

Work-organisation options that are considered to be the most beneficial

Key finding: **Flexible working practices** are the **most preferred** work-organisation option.

Respondents were asked to choose up to four work-related options they considered to be most beneficial (whether or not they currently had access to them). The four most popular were:

i) **Flexible working practices**

ii) **3% cost of living increase**

iii) **Senior managers setting a positive example of good work-life balance**

iv) **Three days extra paid holiday per year**

Flexible working was by far the most popular, with 79.9% of respondents choosing it in their top four, compared to 56.4% choosing a '3% cost of living increase', in their top four.

When compared by Gender and Parental-status, the **top three** remained unchanged, suggesting **men and women, and parents and non-parents, hold them in similarly high regard**. However, whilst 'three days extra paid holiday per year' was the fourth most popular for respondents as an entire group, and for males, females and parents separately; non-parents preferred 'Stress management sessions / techniques'.

Notably, the two options that relate to holiday and salary increases have a direct associated cost for employers, whereas those pertaining to **flexibility and positive examples set by senior managers are potentially low-cost**.

The combined ranking of the results are shown below in Figure IV, with the percentage of respondents who selected each option as one of their top four preferences.

Figure IV: Work-organisation options considered most beneficial

Option	Ranking	%
Flexible working practices	1	79.9%
3% cost of living increase	2	56.4%
Senior managers setting a positive example of good work-life balance	3	54.8%
3 days extra paid holiday per year	4	51.6%
Paid carer / parental leave	5	23.1%
Above the statutory minimum pay for maternity leave	6	18.9%
Stress management sessions / techniques	7	18.8%
Emergency childcare facilities	8	16.8%
Shared parental leave (ability to transfer maternity leave and entitlements to the father so the mother can return to work)	10	13.5%
Relationship counselling / support	11	8.4%
Above the statutory minimum pay for paternity leave	12	5.3%

KEY ■ Ranking
■ % of respondents who included option in their top four

9   CBI (2011), *Healthy Returns: Absence and workplace health survey 2011*, Accessed 16 August, 2011 from http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/955604/2011.05-healthy_returns_-_absence_and_workplace_health_survey_2011.pdf

3 Findings: Relationship Quality and Work Engagement

Developing on these descriptive results, statistical tests were performed to answer the main aim and research questions. **The following findings are 'statistically significant'**. This means there is a less than 5% likelihood of them being due to chance.

Relationship Quality and Work Engagement were tested against a number of the other 'scale' and demographic factors (using multiple regression analysis). This was to determine if any of these factors individually predict levels of Relationship Quality and Work Engagement. More specifically, both were tested against: *Work-Family Conflict* (family-life impacting on work-life), *Family-Work Conflict* (family-life impacting on work-life); *Work Centrality* (the relative value of work in one's life); *Gender; Age; Parental-status; Flexibility; Sector of employment; and Level of seniority.*

Levels of *Personal* and *Joint annual income* were not included as they correlate strongly with *Level of seniority.*

Factors that predict levels of Relationship Quality

The following **five factors** had an **independent** and **statistically significant association with Relationship Quality**:

1 **Work Engagement:** those who were more engaged at work reported better Relationship Quality with their partner

2 **Parental-status:** Parents had lower Relationship Quality than non-parents

3 **Work-Family Conflict**: Those with greater levels of Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life) reported worse Relationship Quality

4 **Family-Work Conflict:** Those with greater levels of Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life) reported worse Relationship Quality

5 **Flexibility:** Those who worked flexibly reported lower levels of Relationship Quality compared to those who do not

Factors that do *not* predict Relationship Quality

Gender, Age, Work Centrality (the relative value of work in one's life), *Sector of employment*, and *Level of seniority* (which correlates with levels of *Personal* and *Joint annual income*) did not significantly predict Relationship Quality.

Factors that predict levels of Work Engagement

The following **nine factors** had an **independent** and statistically **significant association with Work Engagement**:

1 **Relationship Quality:** Those with better Relationship Quality reported higher levels of Work Engagement

2 **Gender:** Women reported higher Work Engagement compared to men

3 **Work Centrality:** Those who saw work as more central to their lives were more engaged at work

4 **Work-Family Conflict:** Those with greater levels of Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life) reported lower Work Engagement

5 **Family-Work Conflict:** Those with greater levels of Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life) reported lower Work Engagement

6 **Sector of employment (Public):** Those who work in the Public sector were less engaged at work compared to those in the Private sector

7 **Level of seniority (Junior level) (which correlates with low annual income):** Those employed at a Junior level were less engaged at work than those at a Senior or Chair/CEO/MD level

8 **Level of seniority (Mid-level) (which correlates with middle annual income):** Those employed at a Mid-level were less engaged at work than those at a Senior or Chair/CEO/MD level

9 **Flexibility:** Those who work flexibly were more engaged at work than those who did not

Factors that do *not* predict Work Engagement

Age and *Parental-status* did not significantly predict Work Engagement.

Key trends

In response to the main aim of this study, these tests show that **Relationship Quality and Work Engagement are positively associated**, with high or low levels in either correlating respectively to high or low levels in the other.

Furthermore, Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life) has a stronger negative influence on both Work Engagement and Relationship Quality than Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life). That is, **stress from work exerts a greater negative impact on work performance and family life, compared to stress originating from family-life**.
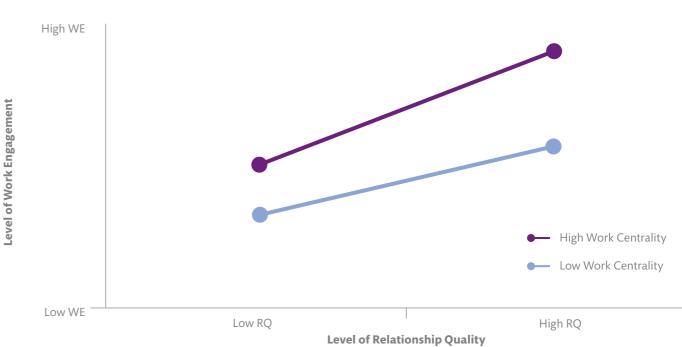
The strength of the connection

Statistical tests (hierarchical regression analysis) were performed to **assess if any factors 'moderated'** (or influenced) **the strength of the connection** between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement.

The factors tested were: *Work-Family Conflict* (work-life impacting on family-life), *Family-Work Conflict* (family-life impacting on work-life), *Work Centrality* (the relative value of work in one's life), *Gender, Flexibility* and *Parental-status*.

Of these, only **Work Centrality** (the relative value of work in one's life) **influenced this association**.

As shown below in Figure V, for individuals with a higher degree of Work Centrality (the relative value of work in one's life), the association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement is stronger than for those who deem work to be less central to life.

Figure V: The impact of Work Centrality on Work Engagement and Relationship Quality

4 Conclusions

Overview

The project discovered that there *is* **a positive connection between Work Engagement and Relationship Quality**.

The findings therefore show that **work-life balance is not the bringing together of two separate and competing domains**, but rather the two need to be understood as two aspects of the same dynamic.

Further, it appears that **home-life can be a real driver of motivation and performance at work, and work-life can have a real impact on personal relationships**. This is supported by the qualitative findings, which can be found in the full report on the OnePlusOne and Working Families websites.

Working Life

Respondents tended to regularly **work longer hours** than they were contracted to, had less access to flexible working practices than the UK average (despite this being the most popular choice from a list of work-organisation options) and regularly **took less than 30 minutes away from work during their lunch** (or other main meal) break. Further, **'presenteeism'** (attending work whilst ill) was common. **This suggests that over-working is prevalent amongst this sample, and that the traditional notion of the 'lunch-hour' is effectively defunct.**

A **summary of the findings** relating to how work is organised is provided below:

- Two-thirds (63.6%) of respondents have access to and use flexible working practices, with the most common being flexible-time (able to vary when work is done), reported by 42.9%. Of those that do not work flexibly, 38.4% said that their job would not permit it, and 15.2% said it would damage their future job prospects.

- It was common practice for respondents to work more than their contractual obligations. Full-time employees worked on average 3.3 extra hours per week (9.0%), and those part-time worked an average of 2.0 extra hours per week (8.2%).

- Approximately two-thirds (64.6%) of respondents had attended work whilst ill in the past 12 months. The most common reason was 'my work just had to be done'.

- Approximately two-thirds (66.9%) of respondents take 30 minutes or less for their lunch (or main meal break).

- Flexible working practices were the most popular choice from a selection of work-organisation related options, followed by a 3% cost of living increase.

Relationship Quality and Work Engagement

The research provides a wealth of detail on work and family life. It shows that **Work Engagement and Relationship Quality significantly predict one another**. However, it also provides a nuanced understanding of the conflict that can transfer between work and family life. It shows that Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life) has a stronger association with Relationship Quality and Work Engagement than Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life). This means the negative influence of stress may well be greater going from work to home, than from home to work. **An increase in work pressures may therefore create a negative feedback loop for employers:** as heightened work stress will likely have a negative impact on workers' relationships at home, which can, in turn, decrease their levels of Work Engagement. Equally, **acting to alleviate pressures at work can conversely establish a virtuous cycle that benefits both employers and employees**.

This report also provides evidence that flexible working practices relate to positive outcomes at work. Interestingly, the current findings show some discrepancy in how flexible working is associated with Work Engagement and Relationship Quality. Whereas working flexibly is associated with higher Work Engagement it is linked to slightly lower levels of Relationship Quality. **It is important to note that the positive association between flexibility and Work Engagement was stronger than the negative association found between flexibility and Relationship Quality.** These somewhat mixed findings are consistent with the existing body of research evidence. **Working flexibly can have a positive influence on both work and personal domains,** but for some it can relate to higher degrees of conflict between work and family-life, as the boundaries can become blurred. Earlier research indicates that **flexible working may allow job demands to penetrate further into the home domain,** particularly through technological change that means individuals can work almost anywhere[10].

It is also worth considering that the high proportion of women respondents in this study may partially explain the negative association found between flexibility and Relationship Quality. Whilst working flexibly has enabled women's participation in the labour market to increase, their allocation of domestic labour has not decreased correspondingly[11]. **As women are more likely to work flexibly and generally tend to take on more family responsibility than men, the likelihood of flexible working negatively encroaching on home and personal life may be heightened.** The study findings suggest that working flexibly predicts higher Work Engagement and is also something that employees value and often seek. However, **help to minimise the potential cross over effect of work on family life could enable employees to manage flexible working more effectively**.

The findings also show that the connection between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement is stronger for those who deem work to be more central to life. High Work Centrality is not necessarily an indicator of a workaholic, but rather a general indication of how central to life the notion of work is considered to be. Whilst it might typically be assumed that those who rate work as being central to life may allow it to eclipse their personal relationships, the findings actually suggest **that those who are more fulfilled in work may also be more fulfilled at home**.

A **summary of the findings** relating to Relationship Quality and Work Engagement is provided below:

- Work Engagement and Relationship Quality are positively associated with each other: high or low levels in either correlate respectively to high or low levels in the other.

- Relationship Quality and Work Engagement each reduce with increasing levels of Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life) and Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life).

- Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life) is more negatively associated with both Work Engagement and Relationship Quality than Family-Work Conflict (family-life impacting on work-life): that is, the negative influence of stress may well be greater going from work to home, than home to work.

- Those who work flexibly report higher Work Engagement but have slightly lower Relationship Quality compared to those who do not work flexibly.

- Women report higher Work Engagement than men.

- Work Engagement is higher for those in the Private sector, those in more senior positions, and those with higher Work Centrality (the relative value of work in one's life).

- Parental-status is not associated with Work Engagement, yet parents have a lower level of Relationship Quality than non-parents.

- The association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement is moderated by Work Centrality (the relative value of work in one's life): the more important an individual considers work, the stronger the association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement.

10 Schieman, S., Milkie, M.A. & Glavin, P. (2009), 'When work interferes with life: The social distribution of work-nonwork interference and the influence of work-related demands and resources', *American Sociological Review*, 74: pp.966–988.

11 Burnett, S.B., Gatrell, C.J. Cooper, C.L. & Sparrow, P.R. (2010), 'Well balanced families? A gendered analysis of work-life balance policies and work family practices', *International Journal of Gender in Management*, (25)7.

5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the research and explore **how employers might approach the connection between work and family life**.

Relationship support

The headline finding is the positive association between Relationship Quality and Work Engagement that exists independently of the other work-centric, relationship-centric and socio-demographic factors. That is, **high Relationship Quality would extend to improvements in Work Engagement. Likewise, improvements in Work Engagement would predict increases in Relationship Quality**.

This study shows that it is in the employers' interest to do what they can to maintain or improve levels of Relationship Quality among their staff. This could range from offering online relationship support or counselling through to having support available for those that could face relationship difficulties in the future (such as those becoming parents for the first time). Based on this evidence, employers should be encouraged to view **Relationship Quality as an asset, and one that requires investment**.

The qualitative data illustrate how Relationship Quality can facilitate greater Work Engagement through 'buffering' against work-related stress. There is a suggestion that this buffer can help maintain a balance between the psychological demands of work and the degree of control over work – lacking such control over life is linked to poor psychological and physical health. **A stable, positive home/family life was shown to enable people to be more engaged in their work.**

Work-Family Conflict

Work Engagement and Relationship Quality are both reduced by increased levels of Work-Family Conflict (work-life impacting on family-life). Employers therefore need to be sensitive to the impact of increasing demands of work on home-life. **By reducing Work-Family Conflict, this may improve Work Engagement. Further, it may improve Relationship Quality, which, in turn, may predict higher levels of Work Engagement, creating a virtuous cycle.**

This can be achieved through addressing: long-working hours, provision and take-up of effective flexible working options, and lack of awareness regarding caring responsibilities, etc. **Managers should be up-skilled and employees enabled to take responsibility for ensuring that the work environment remains positive and productive.**

Presenteeism and overwork

There is evidence that many employees are working longer hours, taking fewer breaks and coming in to work when ill (presenteeism). This is of particular concern as presenteeism is calculated to be twice as costly to the UK economy as stress-related absence[12]. **Presenteeism can be seen as evidence of excessive workload and Work-Family Conflict.**

Employers can address this issue in a number of ways: by **improving job design**; ensuring that employees take adequate breaks from work; providing access to stress management sessions and techniques; **allocating work appropriately** according to the time that employees have; and encouraging senior managers to set a **positive example of good work-life balance**.

Flexible working

Flexible working was predictive of higher Work Engagement but also of slightly lower Relationship Quality. Further, flexible working practices is the option employees most preferred when asked to choose from a list. This suggests **employees adopting flexible working may well need support in managing the interface between work and home-life given the opposite association with Relationship Quality**.

To support flexible working, employers should develop a mutually beneficial, consistent and embedded culture of flexibility, rather than an approach that manages requests as an exception to the norm. They could also offer support and guidance in effective flexible working and ways to minimise any possible negative impacts on Relationship Quality. **To achieve this, employers need to ensure that flexible working does not become 'all the time working', by preventing expectations that employees are permanently available.** Senior figures should also work visibly in a balanced and flexible way, demonstrating by their own modeling that is it acceptable and no barrier to success within the organisation.

Gender

Women: Work Engagement is not predicted by parental-status. Women's engagement is shown to be higher than men's. This counters the gendered assumption that mothers are likely to be less engaged at work than fathers and employees with no children. **Employers should avoid the assumption that women will not want to focus on their careers if they have children**, and ensure that they have monitoring in place to track the effects of discrimination and unconscious bias.

Men: Men are less engaged at work than women, and flexibility is a predictor of higher Work Engagement. However, evidence shows than men tend to take up formal flexibility far less often than women[13]. Employers should observe and monitor men more closely to ensure that **flexible working policies are aligned and communicated in such a way that men are able to access them equally**, without concern over it damaging their career.

Further research

The cross-sectional survey design does not allow any conclusions about direction of association or inferences of any cause/effect relationship. So, although Relationship Quality and Work Engagement are positively associated, it is not correct to assume that one necessarily causes the other. A means to address this would be some further research, adopting a longitudinal design (i.e. following up respondents on more than one occasion). If some workplaces were offered a particular intervention, and an alternative intervention offered to others, the analysis would be able to more accurately assess whether any apparent association extended towards causation. Also, conducting a study among a more representative sample of employees would be desirable, especially to include a greater proportion of men.

12 Cooper, C.L. (2012) 'Wellbeing at Work', accessed 17th May, 2012, http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Media/Press-Release-Detail?oItemId=762
13 Burnett, S.B., Gatrell, C.J., Cooper, C.L. & Sparrow, P.R. (2010), 'Well-balanced families? A gendered analysis of work-life balance policies and work family practices', Gender in Management, 25(7): pp1754-2413.

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