

 a **working families** publication

# Research Report

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# Lifecycles

**Building business success**  
through effective employment practice

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The Working Families logo, featuring three stylized human figures in purple, red, and blue, with a larger blue figure at the bottom center.  
**working families**

changing the way we live and work



## Foreword

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**Back in 2007 when UBS first began discussing sponsorship of the Working Families Lifecycles research, a key area of interest for us was learning more about how organisations could use flexible working to support the “sandwich generation” – those employees who have both childcare and eldercare responsibilities.**

This interest originated from our interaction with employees through our ‘Family Matters’ employee network, which focuses on initiatives to help employees better manage their work commitments alongside their family lives. Increasingly, employees were struggling to balance these demands and consequently, were looking for ways to help manage their responsibilities while furthering fulfilling careers. So, we were interested to learn how we, as an employer, could help support and retain talented employees through flexible working practices.

A lot has happened since 2007, with many firms facing a series of unprecedented challenges. Finding themselves in uncharted waters, they’re exploring how flexible working can help alleviate some of the pressures that employees are experiencing. This ranges from promoting flexible working practices as an aid to employee engagement, through to offering flexible choices as a way of minimising necessary headcount reductions. The recession has made a thorough understanding of flexible working even more of an imperative.

UBS is pleased to have been able to partner with Working Families and our co-sponsors Herbert Smith and PricewaterhouseCoopers on this important research. We, like others, remain open minded as to how we can better support the “sandwich generation” and accommodate all our employees’ needs, while also understanding how best practice in flexible working can be used as an important tool in supporting the business.

**Maria Bentley**  
Global Head of Human Resources  
UBS Investment Bank

# Lifecycles

## Building business success through effective employment practice

### Research Report

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# Introduction



**The value of flexible working within organisations is not in doubt. This report considers both the employee viewpoint and that of their managers, giving a rounded picture of the way flexible working really plays out.**

It also suggests ways in which both sides think improvements could be made. This is important, as flexible working has increasingly been seen as a tool to relieve pressure on businesses in this current recession.

Listening to the employee and their manager offers the opportunity to understand better the needs of the business and its people at all points in their careers. Uniquely, this report considers the need, and the response to that need, for flexible working over the whole employee lifecycle, from joining through to retirement. Taking this view of the ‘whole’ employee, the deployment of flexible working is revealed as a key tool for effective management which will have bottom-line benefits. It demonstrates that flexible working is the right thing – for individuals and for the business.

I would like to thank UBS and their co-sponsors Herbert Smith and PricewaterhouseCoopers. This has not been an easy time for many organisations, but their commitment to this research was never in doubt. This is good news on two counts: it shows that flexible working is deeply embedded in these organisations, and it’s not just a luxury add-on for economic good times; and it shows that flexible working is a vital tool in organising work in a mutually beneficial way.

**Sarah Jackson OBE**  
Chief Executive  
Working Families



[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

**Figure 1: Approximate spread of focus group participants in terms of ages and stages**

| Ages and stages   | 18-30<br>(Generation Y) | 31-44<br>(Generation X) | 45-63<br>(Baby Boomers) | 64-69<br>(Silent Generation) |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Starting out      | ██████████              |                         |                         |                              |
| New parent        |                         | ██████████              |                         |                              |
| Growing families  |                         | ██████████              | ██████████              |                              |
| Time out          |                         | ██████████              | ██████████              |                              |
| Caring for others |                         | ██████████              | ██████████              |                              |
| Transitioning out |                         |                         | ██████████              | ██████████                   |

We would like to thank all the participants for their valuable contributions.



# About the research

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**This report is based on qualitative research carried out by Working Families, sponsored by UBS, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Herbert Smith. The aims of the research were to:**

1. Identify the issues that lead people to consider flexible working
2. Learn from the experiences of managers
3. Provide practical ideas (drawn from the above) to help embed flexible working and make it work for the business as well as the individual

## Our definition of 'flexible working' encompassed:

**Flexible working time** (eg flexi-time, regular/occasional compressed hours, annualised hours)

**Flexible workplace** (eg working off-site, regularly/occasionally from home or another location)

**Reduced working hours** (eg job-sharing or other forms of part-time working)

The focus of the research was organisations where people tend to be highly driven and where client expectations and average hours are very demanding: the City of London and environs.

The study took place against the backdrop of upheaval on an epic scale, due to the economic crisis. Initially, 29 organisations came to a breakfast meeting in the autumn of 2008, hosted by lead sponsors, UBS. Soon after, Lehman Brothers folded. Others chose to withdraw because of the timing and the exceptional circumstances.

In total 14 firms participated (see back page for names of these). Among the reasons given for doing so were: the need to explore the increasingly blurry interface between work and home; how to manage work-life when managers and teams are under increasing pressure; what concerns managers might have around managing flexibility; what else would help 'nudge' along those who are sceptical about the value of flexible working. In addition, they felt it was important to look at ways to help and motivate employees, especially in the downturn and to remain attractive to Generation Y – the young workers of the future.

## Collecting the data took several forms:

**1)** Each organisation was asked to provide one or two managers to participate in structured telephone interviews. We asked to speak to managers with responsibility for a wide range of client facing and support roles. In all, 18 managers were interviewed, nine men and nine women, evenly spread across banking, accountancy, consultancy services and law.

**2)** Each organisation was also asked to recruit employees at different ages and stages and disciplines to participate in our focus groups. These were promoted as being fully confidential and done chiefly by group email forwarding our letter of invitation. In this, we emphasised that the research was looking at people at all ages and stages in their careers and was open to people either working flexibly already or wishing to do so in some form or other.

Lunchtime focus groups were hosted by participating organisations (special thanks for these go to UBS, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Herbert Smith and Credit Suisse). People unable to attend could still email us and we conducted a few semi-structured interviews by phone. In this way, in total we interviewed 64 people spread across several generations who self selected themselves: 75% female, 25% male.

**3)** In addition, we asked for volunteers to act as case studies. Some of these were from the focus groups, but others contributed separately. We asked contributors to tell us about what kind of flexible working they did and the challenges and tips for making it work. These were emailed to us or written up from telephone interviews and a cross-section of these are included in this report.

# Summary of findings

## Use of flexible working

People at all stages of the working lifecycle expressed the desire for flexible or 'smarter' working hours. Three types of flexibility were used:

- 1. Occasional ad hoc flexing of hours or working from home** (useful when there were travel problems caused by snow or disruptive events, but also to allow for give-and-take in handling personal or work needs)
- 2. Formally agreed long term changes or reductions in work hours** (to manage work with ongoing personal needs)
- 3. Planned short term periods of flexible working or extended breaks** (to accommodate temporary work-life issues)

Ad hoc flexibility was the most common sort of working arrangement. The option to use this varied significantly, depending on management attitudes as well as role. Younger workers wanted greater flexibility but were the least likely to ask for it or to be offered the possibility.

Formal agreements to change or reduce working hours, either temporarily or permanently, were largely still the preserve of working mothers. There were other examples but fathers and carers of adult dependents still felt that in general it was not OK to ask for flexibility for family reasons.

Employees thought that flexible working was often a 'smarter' use of their time and skills, enabling them to be responsive to clients' needs whilst addressing their own too. It was often about making greater efficiencies in how work got done alongside other demands of daily life, such as commuting, personal development and home responsibilities. Flexibility was also seen as a way of managing stress levels when working in a high intensity environment. Where a company was seen to be forward thinking in this area, this greatly enhanced an employee's view of the firm.

## Action points suggested by employees

Overall, the view was that organisations had taken major steps towards flexible working in recent years but there was still frustration about the pace of change and a sense that businesses were losing out as a result. Having looked at what was currently happening on the ground,

all the focus groups were asked what they thought needed to happen next to help embed flexible working and make it work well for all sides:

The top three things requested across the board were:

- **More role models**
- **Managers to build greater competency around managing flexible working**
- **Leadership from the board or departmental head**

Next came:

- **Managers to initiate discussions, rather than wait to be asked**
- **Change the City culture of indispensability and presenteeism**
- **Continue developing IT solutions to enable people to work differently**
- **Foster mutually supportive teams**
- **Create networks internally or across the City to exchange experiences on flexible working**

## Specific issues at different life stages

For those **starting out**, leadership and a change in managers' attitudes was very important. Other issues were being able to see more women appointed to top posts at a younger age and more practical information geared to younger workers about flexing working hours.

For **first time parents** - more performance indicators, so that outputs are more easily managed, make it OK for more fathers to work flexibly occasionally and for this not be seen as a 'soft option'. On the client side, more could be done to manage expectations and encourage them to adopt similar policies, possibly with the help of the firm's HR team. In the community, the cost of childcare was also a major issue which reduced an employee's ability to respond as flexibly as they might outside their agreed hours.

For **growing families**, with children at school, flexibility was essential around an increasing range of activities – school plays, sports, helping children with homework and generally trying to fit work alongside what one person described as a 'Victorian' school timetable. Some had additional care issues – for example, looking after a child with special needs or looking after children and a sick

partner or elderly relative. Sometimes people had multiple issues to juggle at one time.

For those wanting some flexibility in order to take **time out to refresh** the view was that present documentation was off-putting, unless you are a parent with an overt need for family time. Firms were accommodating flexible working as a matter of legal compliance and could be more positive about the business benefits too. They felt that it was important that the whole team supported flexible working and felt it applied to them too, rather than feeling resentful. They were also concerned about progress in this area because managers were put off the idea of opening up flexible working because of the attitude of a few 'clock watchers'.

For **carers of adult dependents** the chief need in work was for clearer communication of flexible working policy to ensure that carers felt it was OK to request it too. They would also welcome more awareness raising so that managers and those without caring responsibilities – especially younger colleagues, were more understanding of the unpredictable nature of caring. In the community, there was a shortage of care provision and the fact that carers often had to work as well as look after a relative or friend was often overlooked by service providers.

For those **transitioning out of the City**, clearer guidance and a more positive approach from HR, rather than 'putting up obstacles' was requested, so that options like job-sharing might be considered at this stage. Since expressing interest in reducing hours in the years preceding retirement might be seen negatively if initiated by the employee, they also thought that a standard prompt to managers to talk about working options would be useful at review time. More generally, a revision of the 'head count' approach to staffing levels might make part-time working easier to accommodate.

## What makes flexible working work?

The positive experiences of some of the participants and case studies suggested that the success of a flexible working arrangement came down to how well it was planned and managed. To be effective, a flexible working option should be tailored to suit the job. Those who did this said it had been important to be pro-active in finding the optimum solution. Rigid arrangements were less workable than those with some elasticity. Client

expectations needed to be managed and it was best to be transparent around flexible working and back-up arrangements for it. Above all a positive attitude from line managers and colleagues was vital. Many examples were given of good practice on the part of managers and of it working at team level. These could be shared more widely to encourage further take-up.

Where there were problems with requesting flexibility, they were often about inconsistencies in the approach of managers and their seeming lack of interest in pastoral care of staff (this was not helped by having relatively few HR specialists in private sector firms). As a result, companies might put out one message around supporting flexibility, but fail to translate it into action at local level. The gap between expectation and reality then led to disappointment and cynicism.

To move forward, whether working flexibly full-time or reducing hours, there was a consensus that both managers and their reports must be effective in how it is managed. As a starting point, this means being able to have open, mature conversations within teams in order to find out what would work best and how progress would be measured. Some people do this with ease when it comes to work-life issues, but it is a competency that others need to develop, either through training or shadowing peers who are already working in flexible teams.

People also admitted that they could be their own greatest critic – not asking for help when they needed a bit more flexibility, or else feeling guilty when they did. Consequently, they either denied themselves the option of working flexibly or over compensated by putting in extra hours when working part-time or from home. They suggested it would be encouraging to have more real life examples of people at all ages and stages working flexibly, including people at the top of organisations. This would make different ways of working more culturally acceptable and reduce concerns about the impact of flexible working on career progression.

Together with role models, a lot more information about the effective implementation of flexible working was also suggested. This might be done through the use of City networks or via a 'virtual' forum where ideas could be shared.

## Case studies

The case studies at the end of this report illustrate how individuals at all ages and stages are already making flexible working work. The five most frequently mentioned tips given were:

- **Find a supportive line manager**
- **Be organised and good at planning ahead**
- **Be prepared to be flexible about your arrangement sometimes**
- **Enlist the support of your colleagues and show consideration for their needs too**
- **Be upbeat in suggesting solutions but also set some reasonable boundaries**

## Managers' views

Most of the managers interviewed now have flexible working of some form happening in their teams. They expect critical mass to drive this forward but also the business imperative to change.

Overall, the managers in the study rate their firms as making good progress with accommodating flexible working and think HR do a good job on the whole. However the view from some is that their organisations could do better when it comes to promoting the benefits of flexible working to the business, rather than tolerating it merely as an employee 'accommodation'.

In the short term, they thought fear about jobs and a 'herd' mentality would result in people being more visible in the office and less likely to be working from home or requesting a change in hours. However, this did not mean that managers wanted a return to more rigid ways of working. On the contrary, the business opportunities, coupled with the social reasons for greater mobility and flexibility in how work gets done, meant that it was here to stay.

Increasingly competitive markets, especially in the downturn, have put pressure on everyone to work harder than ever before. Many managers felt that permitting some flexibility in working hours was an important factor in helping surviving staff to cope with the pressure.

Many of the managers benefited from being able to flex their own schedules to make the smartest use of their time (several of the telephone interviews were conducted with managers working off-site, from home or other locations).

There appears to be a tension between managers – faced with the reality of business demands – wanting to support flexible working yet hesitating to raise unrealistic expectations about it. The main issue is reconciling flexible hours for employees with senior managers' and clients' expectations of a 'seamless' service. Convenience to clients and prompt service are of paramount importance. However, concern was expressed around over promising on delivery at the expense of other considerations, such as the quality of expertise, continuity in relationships with clients and the negative impact of excessive hours on individuals' productivity levels and families. The experience of some managers who had challenged the status quo was that, when flexibility was discussed with clients, most were reasonable and open to alternative ways of working, provided the job got done.

Managers still see working reduced hours or job-sharing as chiefly the preserve of women with children. A recent increase in numbers taking maternity leave suggests demand from this quarter will continue to grow. The issue of people needing to reduce hours to care for adult dependants is slowly emerging too. Managers said they assumed if people wanted more flexibility, they would ask for it, but they were not aware of much demand from other quarters, apart from occasional ad hoc flexibility.

Managers qualified their general support of flexible working with a few reservations. At very senior levels (where people are expected to do a lot of extra networking and marketing of the business) some felt there was a question mark about the feasibility of combining the demands of this more entrepreneurial role with reduced working hours. There was also a concern about a small minority of cases where the arrangement had not worked for one reason or another. When it worked well, it was highly successful, but when team needs were not fully considered it could generate resentment or worse, client dissatisfaction. The main observation was that flexible working worked best when people, within reason, were able to be a little fluid about their flexibility.



## Conclusions and key action points

Overall, the impression gained from participants was of a group of highly talented and motivated employees who value the stimulus and kudos of working among peers at the top of their professions. They acknowledged that they are relatively privileged to be working in such an environment. At the same time, the pace at work is ever faster, made all the more demanding by the economic downturn. To sustain the pace in the current climate, the need for 'smarter' solutions to help employees cope has become pressing. This is true of people at all ages and stages. The picture that emerged was one of growing numbers of people 'splicing' together the different strands of their work-life, in a bid to create a robust whole.

This is in the context of a recession that is distinguished from previous ones in that there is now a workforce familiar with – and creative about – using multi-modal forms of communication, the internet and other web 2.0 tools. Here, we are not just talking about the young employees of Generation Y, but people of all ages who have adopted what has been described as the 'Y2.0 culture'. These individuals are relatively comfortable with being more flexible about where and when work gets done. Indeed, they expect to be given the tools to do so. This seemed particularly true of people with experience of other countries where new technology is being rolled out more rapidly. In return for being responsive to work demands, people appreciate greater autonomy to fit work alongside other important dimensions of life. Firms who recognise and cater for this new expectation are likely to get the winning vote in future.

Encouragingly, the majority of managers with experience of flexible working were already seeing the advantages from a business perspective to working this way. The greatest success came from those who took a 'whole team approach' to making it work. Positive support for managers, combined with clearer communication of the business case should enable these benefits to be felt throughout the organisation, thereby enabling individuals who need flexibility to request it and for solutions to be found which are tailored to both business and employee needs.

Manager attitudes can also sometimes waver. This is for a variety of reasons: they may avoid talking about flexible working as an option for fear of raising employee expectations, upsetting clients or having to manage the fallout if the arrangement backfires. There is also some fear around losing control, the impact on targets and how this will be viewed by senior management. If some

managers block flexible working out of fear of the unknown, others may acquiesce to requests, without thinking them through fully, out of uncertainty about where they stand in terms of legislative rights.

### Key action points

- **The availability and success of flexible working arrangements of all types are as much down to the attitude of individual managers as to organisational stance.**

Firms therefore need to do more to support managers and embed the good practices that exist within their organisations. They need to develop competency in managing flexibility so that they are more confident about its potential impact on clients or on their own work-life. Most immediately, skilling in this area would help support their employees through the very challenging climate that businesses are now facing. More long term, it will help to build a 'can do' culture of flexible working that will attract and retain talent.

- **Fear of the unknown results in some senior partners and departmental managers lacking the enthusiasm to endorse flexible working wholeheartedly. The result can be mixed messages about whether a firm genuinely supports new ways of working or is just reacting to external imperatives such as clients' diversity targets, employment legislation or the present economic climate.**

A key step to embedding flexible working is ensuring that senior managers understand the rationale for supporting it and how it will work in practice. Leadership when it comes to 'walking the talk' and encouraging their direct reports to do the same. Managing client expectations is also seen as an important way for people at the top to help embed flexible working as the way forward.

- **To truly gain endorsement for flexible working greater emphasis on the wider business merits of it is needed.**

Organisations which really do endorse flexible working need to be clear internally as to the business case and their values around it. Likewise, if client companies fully

support flexible working for their own employees, these values need to extend to how they treat their contractors in practice, as well as at the tendering stage.

- **Although people are positive about the two-way benefits of smarter working, not everyone uses or requests it, either because they are fearful of the impact on their career or because they don't think it applies to them. Managers may not be aware of the true level of interest in flexibility because of this gap in communications.**

Seeing is believing, so visible role models and the opportunity for people to discuss ideas openly, is important. Managers can take the initiative by telling their teams about flexible working options, rather than waiting for individuals to ask about it. People at all ages and stages would then feel it was legitimate to explore smarter ways of working as a whole team – an initiative that would benefit the managers too.

- **To be effective for both organisations and individuals, the important thing is not so much what kind of flexibility people use (for there are no one size fits all solutions) but how well it is implemented.**

Further highlighting of good practice is needed to show how to manage flexibility effectively (the case studies at the end of this report provide some useful examples for starters). In addition, intranet sites and written guidelines could be backed up with more skilled input from HR. As well as helping managers to develop competency in this areas, there could be greater impetus to develop their pastoral role through targets and the reward mechanism. People should be encouraged to look at implementing flexibility as a team activity, with shared responsibility for planning this and for coming up with effective ways to monitor the results. Helplines, workshops, support networks, coaching and mentoring all play their part.

- **Good management of this issue is not only important for those who would like to take time out in whatever shape or form. It is relevant to the workplace as a whole, applying even to those whose formal working arrangements are standard.**

People need to plan and communicate well, agree ground rules in their teams for flexible working (whether they themselves are working flexibly or not) and show consideration towards one another for making it work well. The skills involved in good management of flexible working can therefore be applied more generally and the benefits felt across the organisation, helping to engender a culture that genuinely supports all employees while meeting business needs in this rapidly changing world.

- **People are very diverse in terms of why and when they would like to work flexibly. Despite progress, some still feel their needs are less visible than others – this includes working fathers and carers of adult dependants but also younger workers or others without obvious family pressures.**

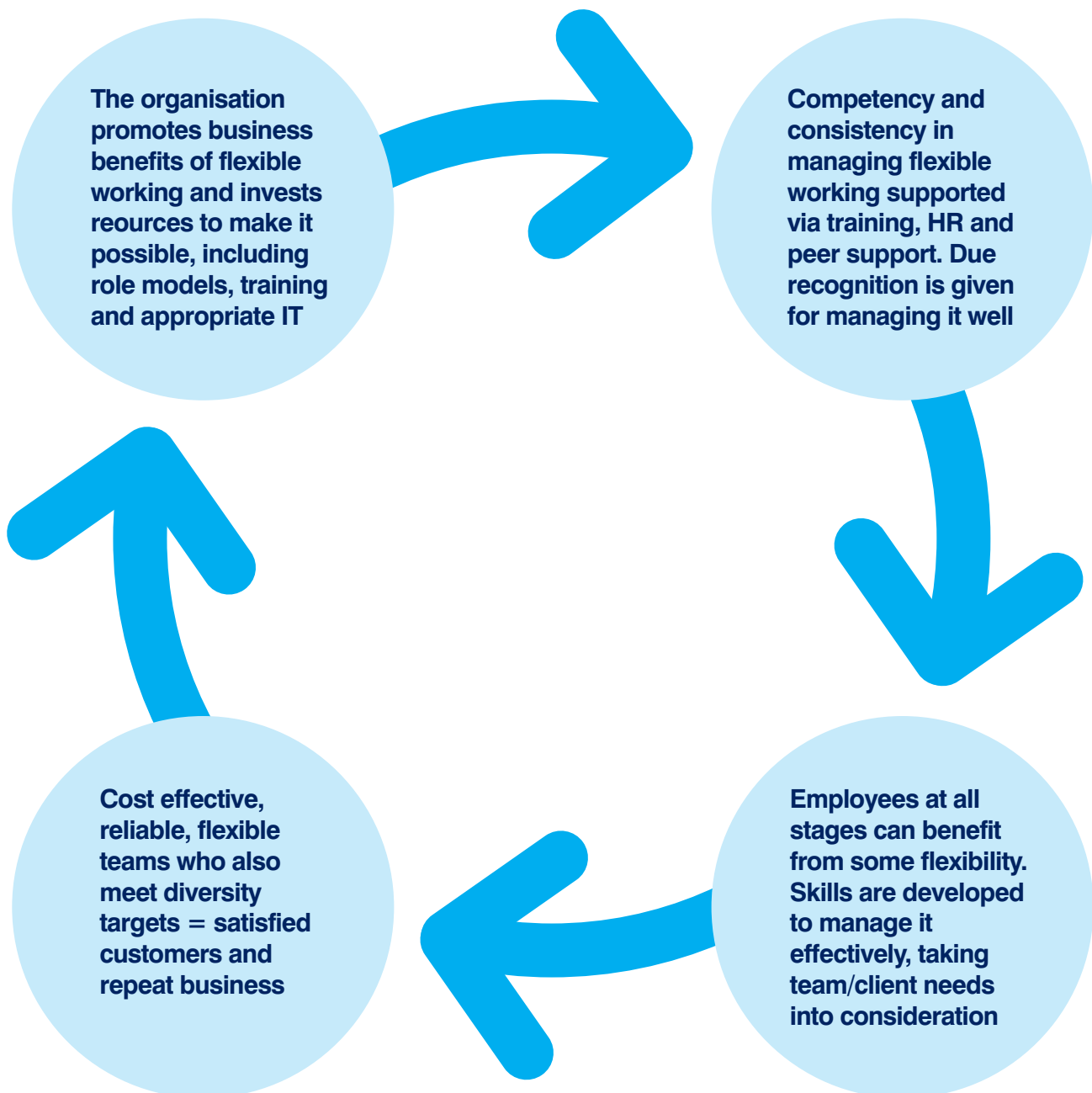
The case studies at the back of this report show how lots of differing arrangements can be managed successfully and we hope that there will be more networking and sharing of such ideas between like-minded businesses as a result. While some people are OK with 'splicing' together the different strands of their work-life, others are less comfortable or less able to manage what they regard as 'spillover' between the two. More discussion within teams would help raise awareness of this as the speed of change escalates. A balance needs to be struck that respects differing values and work styles.

More could also be done to promote the wide range of flexible working options to those who currently feel they miss out, in particular carers. Temporary spells of working flexibly might be appealing to those who either do not want, or don't think they qualify for a more permanent change in hours. The current term: 'v' time, is not well understood, so perhaps some new language around this is needed – 'flexicle', for example, to describe a spell of two or three months of flexible working to get through some of the more temporary life stage issues.

- **This study suggests that flexible working in cross-generational teams is becoming an ever more important competency for organisations to help everyone keep pace with change.**

People at all levels in organisations need to take responsibility for talking about and sharing ideas about how to embed flexible working where they are and for making it work effectively. Employers, managers, individual employees and clients all have a part to play in making work work – for business and for families.

Figure 2





## Section 1

# The manager perspective

The managers who contributed to this part of the study had responsibility for between three and 600 employees. The employees they managed ranged from new recruits to senior members of staff in a variety of client-facing and other roles. The vast majority – 80% – had people working flexibly in their teams. There was no or less flexible working in younger teams – those not considered in need of it. Even then, the advent of the Blackberry and other IT meant most people flexed their time to fit with their demanding roles.

## Awareness of current company policies and practice

Asked how well they understood their company's flexible working policies, all but one manager knew them either 'fairly well' or 'fully understood them'. When it comes to promoting flexible working as a win-win for employees and for the business, the majority rated their firms between 6/10 and 7/10. Just under a fifth scored their firm 4/10 or 5/10 and a similar number scored their firm a higher 8/10 or 9/10. Overall, the picture was of organisations that have made significant progress in establishing flexible working policies as part of their diversity drive but where views are still mixed about the real level of take-up.

"We are well intentioned but don't put in the resource to support flexible working. Some areas are very good, some bad, depending on both the manager and the area of work."

At the same time, there were 'divided loyalties' as one manager described it, between achieving greater diversity and performance in what has become a much more competitive business environment. A minority view, but still a significant one was:

"We are happy to consider it as something the employee wants. We couldn't promote it as a benefit to the business."

"There is a significant shift in mentality as to what we want to achieve as a business. But we have divided loyalties as it were. We want to be more diverse but we exist in an environment which is very competitive, cut throat."

Because of this, while wanting to appear good to their staff, some were cautious of creating too great an expectation for fear of causing disappointment.

"We could be more proactive in suggesting it but the reality is that in some areas...it would be hard for us to cope with everyone requesting this. We want to promote it as a positive thing, rather than finding people are disappointed if they can't do it."

## Are there areas where flex works better than others?

The general view was that it was easier to be flexible about working arrangements when employees were working within the culture of their own organisation. However, when it came to responding to clients' needs, it was essential to fit with their requirements, especially when working at a client's site:

Views from managers were divided about the expectations of clients. While a quarter felt that flexible working was not desirable in client facing roles, the majority were more open to the idea or had seen it working well in some scenarios. The difficulty lay in three areas:

### 1. Less progressive clients or those expecting 24/7 delivery for their money

"There is a difference between where we are (consultancy division) and our clients. Some do have a good policy and some just aren't there yet. Some expect to be able to see the consultant working hard in their office. This is especially true of government departments, keen to demonstrate value for money. But more and more are getting used to the idea."

### 2. Senior bosses who over-promised

"Partners worry that clients might find this unacceptable and it is also down to managing expectations. Sometimes we make commitments for professional pride reasons or whatever that can impact on people's working hours. Often we create the expectation when it is not needed. It is sometimes just thoughtlessness."

### 3. Employees who were either unrealistic or lacked experience of flexible working effectively

"Sometimes, given the nature of this industry (banking) when the workload gets stupid, it is very difficult for team morale if the manager leaves at 4pm and the rest are there till 10pm."

“We had a problem with job-sharing two senior fee earners. The more complex the deal, the harder it is to share information between partners. Subtleties and nuances can't be shared easily.”

Managers' views are also shaped by their own personal experience. One senior female lawyer said:

“In law, it tends to be all or nothing. But now I have children I work flexibly, leaving the office at 6.30 and then working after putting the children to bed. Before children I would have worked till I got it done. If you set your mind to something, you can do it. Clients don't seem to mind and it works well all round.”

Or, from a senior male banker:

“I am the classic workaholic. I have fun from doing what I'm doing so I've tended to spend more time at work. But things have changed a little bit because I have a child now. I try to spend at least a certain number of evenings at home before bedtime and in the mornings. I try to work from home on Fridays when I catch up on the activities of the rest of the week and avoid meetings.”

## What do managers think the company does well?

The majority praised the work of their HR or Diversity teams in putting out a clear message about supporting applications, what is required and the process to follow for formal changes in working hours. At one end of the scale, one manager described how:

“We have features in the internal communications magazine and give case studies. There is also the intranet site and as part of induction, people are introduced to the policies, and managers are briefed on the process. Also the 'water cooler' effect of those who already do it and are willing to talk about it.”

But some felt that there are insufficient resources put in to this and that HR sometimes held back. One interviewee was rather more negative:

“I don't know that we do anything brilliantly well on this, we are flexible and have been good at allowing people to work part-time. We tend to be reactive rather than actively

promoting it. We do want to make it work but there is still a feeling that it doesn't work well and therefore we don't encourage it.”

## Personal experience of managing flexibility in their teams

Of the 18 managers interviewed 14 could give examples of people working flexibly in their teams and several used some form of flexibility themselves (four of the 18 interviewed over the phone, were working from home that day).

The most common application was ad hoc flexibility to work off-site. This might be whilst on the go or trying to work from home one day a week, or leaving work earlier and then working later in the evening from home. All these had been made possible due to new communications technology which meant calls could be taken seamlessly from home or both calls and messages picked up from virtually anywhere on a Blackberry. This kind of flexibility about where work gets done was seen to have many benefits, especially for those managers with international clients. Here there was a win-win in that employees could work from home occasionally where they could get better concentration time whilst getting a break from long commutes. It also meant being able to trade their time, leaving work earlier in the day to visit a sick relative or be home for children's bedtime, before logging on again to pick up on work or make international calls.

One manager, who works full-time, flexibly, described how flexible working had become the norm in her very large team, including compressed hours.

“Interest in flexible working is across the board here. Someone on my team compresses hours in order to do an MA. Another compresses hours to collect her daughter two days a week. My assistant sometimes works from home, using her laptop.”

Maintaining a seamless service to clients was paramount but flexible working was made possible with the right equipment and right attitude from employees and teams. The consensus was that setting up part-time arrangements could be time consuming and required effective management to make them work well. However, with the right attitude, the investment of time paid off and could also benefit managers themselves.

“I enter into this with the attitude that we have to make this work. If you really want to keep talent, you have to find creative and flexible ways for them to work and my experience so far has been very positive.”

“The more senior you become, the easier it is to trade time because you are judged on your performance rather than your face time. I will often trade time with myself – working from home and fitting children’s events around this.”

Among younger workers, managers reported relatively little demand for part-time working, more some desire for two-way flexibility: working long hours but also wanting more autonomy to choose where and when to work sometimes – and expecting the tools to enable them to do so (one person described an employee in an IT ‘department’ who everyone thought was working off-site, locally, who turned out to have been working for several weeks from home in the Far East).

Young workers come from a multitude of cultures with which managers are less familiar, but by being open about what was needed and talking it through, solutions could generally be found to fit with the values of the business and the individual. One manager observed:

“Sometimes you can have difficult issues around things like cultural or religious observances. With one guy it became an issue briefly but by talking it through we came up with a solution that worked for us both.”

When it comes to people working shorter hours and negotiating a change in contract, this was most likely to fit with the needs or values of the employee. The majority of these are still women who want to maintain their careers while spending less time in the office and more time at home, caring for their children. But it might also be for other reasons. Examples provided from current employees were a lawyer in his twenties, doing one day a week volunteering in a charity shop; a person transitioning towards the next phase of life, doing a shorter week and cutting commuter time; and an individual with a growing disability set up to work full-time from home. Aside from accommodating flexible working as a boost to morale for the individual and the longer term benefit of talent retention, the immediate win-win was less transparent. But this did not stop managers from supporting applications, either because of legislation (in the case of parents, carers and disabled people) and because it was seen as ‘the right thing to do’ and fitted with the firm’s notion of corporate social responsibility.

## Business considerations

The four most frequently mentioned benefits from working more flexibly to the business and to customers:

- **Reduced attrition rates and recruitment savings**
- **Value for money from part-timers**
- **Growing own staff for succession planning**
- **Continuity = happy customers**

Other benefits were happier, healthier staff able to be productive long term, encouraging others through good role models, quality of output, cutting travel time and space costs, better levels of concentration work if off-site, succession planning, collegiate, supportive culture

“There are fewer interruptions working from home. We encourage flexible working because it’s been a factor in enabling us to reduce space costs. Meetings done by phone mean massive saving for the business in terms of flights and carbon footprint, even though we have a large IT cost.”

“Retaining people, creating a strong collegiate culture and setting out our stall when it comes to recruitment and motivating and empowering people. It is hard to put a cost on that, but happy customers come from having lower levels of staff turnover and a higher level of responsiveness.”

Just under a third of managers said there were no negatives to the business compared with the benefits. For the rest, concerns were expressed about managing client expectations, providing cover for part-timers, the cost of setting up homeworking, or managing poor performance. One example of the latter was if handovers for job-sharers were not managed well. Additionally, there was some concern for individuals about the impact on their careers if they cut their hours considerably and on fair allocation of bonuses. A consensus view was that a four day working week was easier to manage for all these reasons, than a two or three day week, unless it was a job-share.

“Four days works well, two or three days less so as, by the time they’ve caught up with emails, it is almost time to wind down for the handover.”

“My concerns are about delivery when clients want it. But hopefully if someone has flex they are prepared to be a bit



flexible towards the completion of a transaction, when the pressure is on. One Partner here has agreed a deal to work 80% of his time, deliberately phrased that way so that he could do seven days sometimes, less others.”

**As well as career progression, managers were concerned about the impact of part-time or remote working on individuals and on teams.**

“On the whole, I can’t think of any negative impact provided people are clear about planning. There is, however, an ongoing challenge about how people who are perceived who have flexible hours. It may be a self belief but they always feel they have to prove themselves, and that can be an ongoing pressure.”

“Because we are so spread, some people find they are cut off from their line manager – the social aspect of teamwork is important, just to check in how people are, otherwise there may be an element of isolation working from home.”

**Flexibility for one person should not be at the expense of other members of the team.**

“You need to think about the broader implications – what will happen to the rest of the team? I wouldn’t call it a negative but it has been painful at times in that you have to put in time to make it work, but you have to be prepared for that.”

**Last but not least were managers’ concerns about raising people’s expectations and then managing this.**

“By talking flexibility, we are in danger of being perceived as being over flexible. But the other disadvantage is my limited understanding, leading me sometimes to get overly worried about being politically correct – for example, if someone asks me if they can do prayers, worrying and thinking, crikey, if I say no, I’ll be whisked off to court for being non-PC.”

## **The impact of the current business environment on flexible working**

Managers thought it inevitable that people were becoming cautious about working flexibly (unless it was to put in even longer hours in the current economic climate). However, surviving employees will be under a lot of pressure and some ad hoc flexibility will be important to help them cope through this time. Any reductions in flexible working were considered short-sighted and

nobody wanted to go back to the old, more rigid systems of working. Rather, wider acceptance of flexible working in recent years should be seen as a real opportunity. In the current recession, savings could be made in travel time and office costs and it was also a way to reduce redundancies by encouraging people to temporarily reduce the percentage of time worked or to take career breaks. Here is what some managers said:

“People will be more hesitant to ask for flex because they want to keep their jobs. They are working harder than before and we’ve noted the average work output has increased. On the other hand, some senior people may take 12 month sabbaticals during the recession, so there is more potential for this at senior level than before.”

“In the downturn, the short answer is the big threat will be less of it (flexibility) but in reality, exactly the opposite should happen. If there is a maturity about outputs rather than presence, then flexible working would be an opportunity. But so long as we focus on the simplistic, antiquated approach of using head count rather than a more complex approach to the way we measure staff costs, things won’t change.”

“In these more tricky times, it is more important to enable us to show we are caring. It could also mean we can make savings in salary if people want to work for fewer hours or work flexibly to meet resourcing needs.”

“The recession means work will go up and staff will be cut by one third. For those left, some flexibility in where/when work gets done is an important pay-back for long hours.”

“I’m not convinced that there would be any point in reverting back to exercising more power and control over people. That doesn’t get you anywhere. But I must emphasise you must put in place processes to manage multiple flexible staff: plan systematically, think ahead, map team meetings in good time – a number of things that require adjustment.”

# The future

## Recommendations from managers

Most managers interviewed thought that culture change would happen naturally as a critical mass of people adopted different working arrangement and off-site working increased. Two hurdles continued to be, as one person put it, the 'ball breaking' UK attitude towards long hours in the office and the lack of men visibly working more flexibly. It remains to be seen if the expectations of men in Generation Y will change as they move into more influential roles in the workplace. Meanwhile, managers' recommendations for upping the organisation's score in embedding flexible working were:

- **Lead by example from the top and promote role models at all levels**
- **Case studies of ad hoc flexible working for full timers as well as part-timers**
- **Promote flexible working as something positive for the business**
- **Show that that career progression is based on outputs, not face time**
- **Invest in IT to create a seamless service to clients and effective ways of getting work done**
- **Older workers need recognition too, not just working mothers**
- **Clear guidelines and resourcing to help managers manage flexibility for the whole team**
- **Encourage consistency and help change manager attitudes by rewarding good ones**
- **Reduce some of the bureaucracy that gets in the way of doing the job**
- **Tackle confidentiality issues if working off-site**
- **Guidance and more pastoral care for employees to help them from HR, EAPs, helplines like Working Families, or via coaching and mentoring**

## Managers' tips for making flexibility work

The majority of managers were, in principle, in favour of supporting flexible working where it was needed. They accepted the bottom line necessity to move towards more flexible ways of working in order to be effective at client delivery and to manage overhead costs more closely. Indeed, many were benefiting themselves from an element of flexibility about when and where work got done (several of the interviews were conducted with managers who were working from home that day). Organisations can do all they can to encourage flexible working but ultimately it is also down to local managers to do this effectively. Most took a pragmatic approach to problem solving and offered the following tips, based on their own experience:

- **Manage client expectations at the beginning of projects**
- **Manage employee expectations – there must be give-and-take for this to work**
- **Customise your flexibility to the work you do, not the other way round**
- **Make sure you have a cohesive team with good communications**
- **Set clear guidelines/service level agreements – consistency in days off, organisation etc**
- **Plan ahead to avoid gaps in service delivery**
- **Keep on top of IT developments**
- **Have back-up plans as a team and encourage individuals to have back-up care too**
- **Judge on performance not face time**
- **Be flexible yourself – think through solutions and use HR or other sources if you need help**
- **Trial arrangements first and hold regular reviews as nothing stays the same for long**
- **Trust people to take responsibility and measure productivity by outcomes, not face time**





They are more accepting of work-life ‘spillover’ and at ease with communications being conducted from anywhere, seamlessly. In this sense, ‘balance’ is not so important as being able to ‘splice’ different dimensions of life together effectively.

“Working from home is about delivering, not balance – it’s about my effectiveness”

## Experiences at work

Being versatile about where and when work got done came naturally to this group. They were used to using a range of communication tools to keep in ‘virtual’ touch with friends and networks from anywhere. Having access to decent IT was seen as a ‘no brainer’ and they felt frustrated when workplace systems failed to live up to their expectations.

But being flexible had its down side.

“The expectation is you’ll respond at all times. Effectively it means you are always at work.”

Just as they are willing to be more diverse in how they work, people starting out in the City today appear to come from a far more diverse pool than previously. As well as greater numbers of women (as reflected in our focus group), there are more international recruits. They come from many cultures and faiths. Family values may differ. If working far from ‘home’, they may put in long hours at work but welcome the opportunity of an extended break.

“Taking large chunks of time to travel, like four weeks would be great. This is the flexibility I long for.”

For those in our focus group, born in this country, friend and family networks were also very important and they value personal as well as virtual contact with loved ones living at a distance. They want to be able to make up for long hours by being able to extend the weekend occasionally to visit family or friends without eating into their holiday leave. Whether this sort of flexibility was possible or not was largely down to individual managers.

“At induction, it is positioned as a tool to work flexibly but reality is that my boss drives a 24/7 culture.”

Looking to the future, the expectation was that putting in

long hours now, would later be rewarded with greater opportunities to work flexibly. People of Generation Y are likely to be offspring of Baby boomers – a cohort who were the first to use IT as a means to work more flexibly and, for mothers, to benefit from Maternity Leave and pay. For Generation Y, therefore, having dual career parents is much more of a norm than for their slightly older Generation X bosses. Not surprisingly, expectations were high in the group about employers helping them combine work with family life one day.

“The hours we put in now, will help us get to more senior positions where I can work more flexibly in the future.”

## What people in this group had found helpful were:

- A positive attitude from their line manager
- A boss whose behaviour they could mirror
- Examples of how other people manage it
- Flexibility about flexible full-time hours
- IT as an enabler
- Being well informed about what flexible options they can use
- Open forums when this sort of thing could be discussed

## Becoming a parent

| 18-30<br>(Generation Y) | 31-44<br>(Generation X) | 45-63<br>(Baby Boomers) | 64-69<br>(Silent Generation) |
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| ■                       | ■                       | ■                       | ■                            |

## What kind of flexible working?

Giving birth, becoming a father or adopting a child for the first time is a huge life transition. The people in this focus group (male and female) were trying to work more flexibly

on a daily basis in order to share domestic responsibilities with their partner, to bond with their baby and to keep expensive childcare to a minimum. While the men tended to work full time but flexibly, some of the women had negotiated a reduction in their hours or work week or job-shared.

New mothers retained high expectations of sustaining their role at work and their long term careers. Fathers, conversely, want to be more involved in their parental role and have a closer relation with their children than their fathers were able to have. For both, the high cost of living and home ownership mean being a breadwinner is more crucial than ever.

## Experiences at work

This stage is likely to coincide with moving into more senior, managerial roles with greater responsibility. The plus side to this is having a greater level of autonomy than those just starting out and perhaps being able to delegate more work. This enabled full-timers to 'trade' time between work and home responsibilities. For example, going straight home, instead of to the office, after a business trip and then working later in the evening once the baby is in bed.

Views on working reduced flexible hours were mixed. While most knew that policies existed and that the company promoted these, it was still felt that there was a stigma attached:

"There still seems to be this social stigma – if I leave earlier it's 'thanks for popping in' and 'are you having a half day again?'"

The support of a person's individual manager was also crucial. Although HR were generally good at assisting new parents, it seemed that there was still a 'gaping chasm' between policy and reality on the ground in places. The nature of some jobs meant that certain kinds of flexibility were felt to be off limits because of the length of hours or degree of flexibility they required, but more often it was about personal attitudes on the part of the manager or other staff members.

"Policies are there but people seem to try and find ways that it can't work at a time when you need support the most."

Despite this, due to higher levels of female recruits in

recent years, there was now a significant increase in women taking maternity leave and exercising their legislative rights. This had led to what one person described as 'pregnancy fatigue' and a backlash in some quarters.

"Attitudes towards pregnant women are tough because there has been so many go off on maternity leave and it's felt that some people do abuse the system."

Becoming a parent is something of a watershed when the gap between male and female behaviours widens, partly driven by prevailing social attitudes and people's own expectations. It was noted that female employees with children tended to get labelled 'working mothers' and this focus could cloud their career path. Men, do not get labelled 'working fathers' in the same way. They did not see becoming a parent as career limiting – indeed it could enhance their status as a steady employee. The men in the group said that the down side of this was that, while it was accepted (not always positively by managers) that women needed time off, a dad's role at home was sometimes discounted by colleagues. It was therefore not OK to talk about fatherhood in the same way as motherhood.

"If you come back jet lagged off a flight it is OK to say you are tired, but not if it's the children that kept you awake."

There was the assumption that their wife or another carer was there to do it all. While one or two men felt that it was their role to be the breadwinner and for their wife to be the carer, the majority of men wanted to share the care, many seeing their wife's career as being as important as their own.

Focus group participants said that they valued the new perspective on life that having a child brought to their work. They found that they related better to other people and were better at managing their time and priorities. They thought this new maturity benefited their employer as well as clients. Greater awareness through personal experience had also changed their own attitudes towards others with caring responsibilities.

"My attitudes changed when I had kids. Before I was upset and frustrated when my male colleague left at 5 and gave me work to finish."

While becoming a parent brought benefits, in terms of personal maturation and greater commitment to an employer, it could also be very stressful if the culture was not supportive. Almost always, a non-supportive culture

meant women either opting out entirely or working but still bearing the brunt of care. One father's comment drew nods of agreement from other men in the focus group:

"I feel a lot of guilt ringing up work and saying I won't be in if a child is ill – I think it is easier for women – somehow it is expected that they will have to."

Cultures are slow to change and while people were disappointed that this was the case, they were also realistic about it. It had sometimes meant compromises and a few of the mothers in the group had changed direction and accepted less demanding posts in order to manage work-home better.

"Once you have had children your priorities have changed and there is a conflict with work. I believe that people need to be honest about this and recognise the need to manage and maybe make compromises with themselves, their partner, their work. Avoid a victim mentality."

"I try to work with people not based in the UK. All interface has to be planned, so is more in my control at mutually convenient times – it's not the pub culture that you get with colleagues working next door to you."

Others continued in their role and tried to take the initiative in managing the expectations of colleagues and clients. It took a lot of organising and could still mean some compromise.

"I work on projects but it would be very difficult if I worked in areas where clients need instant responses. I tell clients at the start of a project what my days are and we work out a communications plan. They know they can always contact my assistant on the days I'm not there and that if it is an emergency, I can be contacted too."

"I job-share, working Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and my partner does Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Previously I did four days per week but struggled as I was trying to do the equivalent of my full-time job."

"I'd like to do something else – to change direction – but it's a case of better the devil you know somehow and the financial rewards are very good."

"I catch up on work after the baby has gone to bed but sometimes find myself saying: have your bottle quickly please because I have to log back on."

The secret to success for new parents was to have support on the home front and to be creative in coming up with solutions at work. There is now a lot of information on company intranets but it also helped to be able to talk and learn from the example of others who were doing it effectively. Showing consideration for business and team needs was also important as was having a supportive line manager. Where this happened, a good team spirit developed and everyone benefited. This created a virtuous circle in which managers also got their needs met.

### What people in this group had found helpful were:

- **Positive attitude of line manager and team**
- **Ad hoc informal flexibility for full-time people**
- **Proof it works for the firm**
- **Thinking strategically and being solutions focused**
- **Coaching on returning to work**
- **High salaries to pay for childcare**
- **Living near work and close family support**
- **Moving to a different role**

## Growing family commitments

| 18-30<br>(Generation Y) | 31-44<br>(Generation X) | 45-63<br>(Baby Boomers) | 64-69<br>(Silent Generation) |
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### What kind of flexible working?

People in this group said they had assumed it would be easier once past the baby stage, as children grew and went to school. In fact, most found the reverse. Life just gets busier as parents can no longer rely on the continuity of pre-school care but must top and tail the school day and factor in lengthy school holidays and occasional unexpected closures (such as shut-downs in early 2009 due to snow).

“We think it’s hard when they are babies, but once you get to school age it becomes more of a juggle – especially when you need to be flexible for work. I rely on my mum to help out when that happens.”

By now, more children may also have arrived, with differing arrangements according to their age.

“Having children at different ages and stages makes my life very complex!”

As well as more complicated schedules, the cost of childcare, already high for one child, became an increasing consideration.

“Especially after the second child it is very hard managing the costs. I feel for someone in a lower role because childcare is so expensive. The cost is huge...but I do the job for sanity and my long term career.”

Externally, as well as the cost of care, frustration was expressed about a mismatch between the ‘Victorian’ education system, planned to fit with an agricultural majority and contemporary working hours. The cost and complexity of childcare for growing families called into question the benefit of full-time working at this stage. Reducing work hours could mean a saving in the cost of care but as well as impacting on earnings, had the disadvantage that, unless a partner, or obliging friend or relative was on hand to help out in an emergency, this

further restricted the individual’s ability to be flexible about work emergencies.

In addition to the general challenges of growing families, in some cases, there may be further complex issues, such as having one or more children with a special need, being a lone parent or taking on step-children. As time goes by, with our ageing population, there is also the increasing possibility of taking on caring responsibilities for an adult dependent. Because of these commitments, many people (mainly the women interviewed) opt to tread water rather than go for promotion, knowing the impact of even longer hours on their crowded lives. Few can get to the top without additional help in the home. For example, one woman (a full-timer with a 100% client facing role) relied on her self-employed partner to help out with their teenage son, who is a weekly boarder. She was also increasingly concerned about reconciling her breadwinner role with having an elderly father, living alone, to worry about now.

“As a full-timer, you have a better reputation for bringing the money in, which is important for me. But even though my son is older now, I took the decision not to go from director to partner. The jump is too great because of selling and prospecting – it adds 30-40% to your time.”

Those who ‘hang in’ juggle increasingly senior roles at work with trying to be good parents but sacrifice ‘me time’, even when it is in the interests of wellbeing, such as going to the gym or spending time with their partner. If they had greater flexibility, it would go mainly on the children – taking them to school sometimes, helping more with homework, or splitting care of different aged children with their partner. It might also mean they could participate more in activities associated with school – meetings with teachers, school plays, contributing to parent committees, etc. They want to be there when their children are sick and to help their partners with this aspect so there is a better sharing of care (especially, for men, when their wives are pregnant again) and less stress on relationships. Aside from family responsibilities they would also like to carve out time for volunteering, personal interests and to get fitter.

### Experiences at work

Those who continue up the career ladder whilst working flexibly for family reasons have by now adopted effective coping strategies to make it work.



“The key to this area is to be as up front as possible, to say ‘I’d love to do more but I can’t do more. Don’t keep your head down, speak up!’”

Participants felt that the need for a change in workplace culture had become far more pressing due to the influx of women into professions in the past ten years.

“Firms must change – at present most of the junior workers are women, but senior management is still predominantly male.”

More senior people in client facing roles also thought it was time for client expectations to be better managed, either by their own bosses or by those responsible on the client side. Some clients need help and encouragement to look at these issues. But in some large firms and government bodies, it was more about attitude to external contractors:

“Working with the public sector, you have to factor in that they are often working part-time or taking time out for half terms and holidays. That said, they won’t accept you working part-time. Because it’s public money, they want your blood.”

However, individuals needed to play their part too and while some felt that legislation had been a necessary ‘stick’ to force some managers to change behaviours, it could sour relations too.

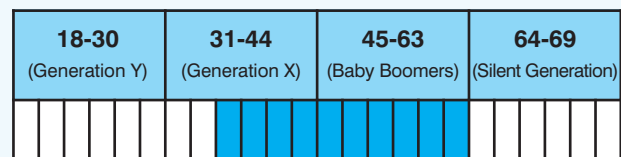
“Legislation makes it hard – one employee took a lot of maternity leave and we didn’t know if she would come back or not, making it hard to plan around. You should be able to have that discussion with people – otherwise, as an employer you are landed with a black hole to fill.”

### What people in this group had found helpful were:

- **Finding a growing critical mass of people working flexibly full-time or part-time**
- **Managers who were good role models and played a pastoral role with individuals**
- **Good communications in the team**
- **Good HR support**

- **Help from a mentor or external coach, especially around transitions**
- **Support networks in or outside work**
- **When both parents were able to share more of the care**
- **Help, specific to the area, with finding and paying for childcare**

## Time out to refresh



### What kind of flexible working?

People considering a short break or sabbatical were the subject of our next focus group. Full-time working might suit the needs of their job and/or their own personal work style. They might feel more focused in an office environment, have clients or reports working in other time zones or opt to work hours to avoid the commuter crush, typically starting early and finishing late.

“With people reporting to me globally, it is far harder to choose my time. Taking a sabbatical is my best option for letting go – then I’ll definitely be switching off my Blackberry.”

This group typically had a lot of responsibility in their job and put in a lot of hours at work. They either did not currently have any dependents or someone else in their family was responsible for this aspect of life. Nevertheless, they recognised the importance of taking a break occasionally. Time out might follow a period of intensive work or be to support their partner in their career, for example, to travel abroad. It might be just to take a rest, to catch up with home maintenance or to pursue other dimensions of their lives – going back to study, volunteering, travelling or doing something creative to refresh. Also, for this group, because of work intensification, they felt the need to grab occasional breaks, even for an ad hoc long weekend when the opportunity arose.

Some were already using homeworking occasionally. Reasons given for this were either to work on something requiring quiet concentration, to cut down on commuting time or because they had been encouraged to do so because of their firm's hotdesking policy. While there were obvious benefits to working off-site, as with other focus groups, views were mixed about the management of it from all sides:

"I allow my team to do this (work from home) sometimes, however if you inherit people who are less mature, or who you are concerned about in terms of their value set, you wonder whether they have the right sense of responsibility for their work."

"The increase in hotdesking means you need to work from home more and you have to be very disciplined when you do that. Managers worry about whether people are doing their jobs – I know I do as a manager."

## Experiences at work

All of this group had experienced an intensification of work in recent years and expected it to become even more challenging because of the downturn. One reason was that, in a changing market with fewer loyalties, there was a tendency for some bosses to over promise to clients.

"There are lots of gorillas on the block – the focus is on speed of delivery, sweating more out of people. The worry is, if we don't respond someone else will."

"To be a super duper top notch service, faster than the competition they will over promise."

A contributing factor was the use of technology – emails, mobile phone calls and instant messaging. One person described how:

"I have a colleague who does not know how to disable emails on his phone. I know of instances where people will pursue you, text you even to say "I'm sure you'll pick up this message."

There was recognition that the pressure came from themselves too. By working long hours they had created an expectation of being able to deliver which meant that even whilst away, they found it hard to switch off.

"People do texting while away because of the long list of

emails on their return to work otherwise. There is also a culture of being so important – being indispensable... and also our human tendency to be curious about who is contacting us."

In the long run, this could be hard to sustain and participants had found that it was possible to take back some control. For example, being up front about what could or could not be done in the time, offering options and showing you were doing your best. All this helps to build trust and people are likely to go along with it if you put it in a reasonable way.

"When I first had my Blackberry, I was obsessed. I have now become much more disciplined and nothing has happened. For some, having a Blackberry is a status thing, meaning you are indispensable."

## What people in this group had found helpful were:

- **Being able to buy extra days off or take long weekend breaks sometimes**
- **Having a right to a sabbatical for any reason, not just for study leave**
- **Having someone who will deputise for you whilst on a sabbatical**
- **Putting more emphasis on quality of work, not just speed**
- **Individuals being strategic about flexible working requests – thinking about what would work for the needs of the job**
- **Good teamwork, with colleagues and clients**
- **Managing expectations with clients in a mature way**
- **Valuing work by outputs not hours**
- **Firms having a genuinely open attitude to new ways of working, 'not just trotting out the same examples to tick the right box when tendering for work'**

## Looking after another adult

| 18-30<br>(Generation Y) | 31-44<br>(Generation X) | 45-63<br>(Baby Boomers) | 64-69<br>(Silent Generation) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 10                      | 10                      | 10                      | 10                           |

### What kind of flexible working?

Not everyone has children, but most people have parents or extended family who may need to be looked after at some stage. It is sometimes assumed that this responsibility comes later in life but according to figures from Carers UK, the people most likely to be caring for someone else are those aged between 30 and 64 and therefore of working age. Furthermore, carers are not a static group – more than 2.3 million people move in and out of caring situations each year. Indeed, becoming a carer can happen overnight as a result of a sudden illness or accident. It could mean looking after a partner, adult child, sibling, other close friend or relative with whom the person lives or had a significant relationship. Caring might be short term, during recuperation from an operation, or long term, as in the case of someone with a chronic condition or mental health problems. It might involve caring for someone towards end of life, for example, sharing care of a parent with cancer or visiting a frail elderly relative in a residential home.

People in this focus group wanted to use flexible working to make time for visits to the cared for person in hospital or a residential home, or to give other siblings a break from a full-time caring role. This could vary from a daily input to taking a long weekend to visit family outside London. It could mean attending medical assessments, arranging the finances of the person they looked after or taking them on outings etc.

Caring for more than one person was not unusual – for example, one person had an adult child with special needs and also an increasingly frail elderly parent. Another had separated elderly parents, both needing support. Because caring could be sporadic, it could mean dropping out of work at short notice, leading to feelings of guilt about letting down work colleagues. It was also less easy to predict the length of time caring would go on. This posed many questions and a need for information about help at work and from the medical establishment:

“The biggest issue for me is unlike childcare I have no idea how long I will have to care for my mother in this way.”

“I find it difficult to understand what is appropriate for a carer in my situation. Where are the boundaries, what is right for the firm and for the family?”

### Experiences at work

The realisation that looking after someone may become more than just a temporary need, marks another tipping point when people may either feel forced to leave work or become preoccupied with how they will cope and for how long. Not having an outlet for these concerns means additional stress for individuals:

“There is a need for emotional intelligence. Managers should know their staff situations and empathise. There needs to be trust.”

“It will cost the firm far more money if I am distracted the whole time because my thoughts are elsewhere, or if I have to leave.”

This group had a very high level of frustration with the lack of support services in the community. At work, although people still felt their needs were invisible when compared to parents’, there were some hopeful signs – especially in organisations who had begun to push the carer agenda:

### What people in this group had found helpful were:

- **A supportive, understanding manager**
- **Measuring outputs, not inputs at work**
- **Having a standard process so that protocols are clear**
- **Clarity about formalising time off with HR**
- **Changing attitudes as people come to trust that you can still deliver to a high standard**
- **Presenting a strong business case**
- **Where there is a standard process for discussing flexible working**

- **Flexibility in how you flex your time to fit with less predictable caring needs**
- **It becoming more OK. to work from home without feeling you are seen as a skiver**
- **A ‘carers’ network and mentoring opportunities**
- **An EAP scheme or other helplines**
- **IT reducing the need for so many face to face meetings**
- **Clients who have more understanding than managers think they have**
- **The legal framework giving carers more rights to make firms and individual managers pay attention**

ventures, self-employment, fundraising for charity, or leisure activities such as studying music, gardening, volunteering, playing golf, going travelling with their partner etc. In some ways, their needs were reminiscent of Generation Y in that they had more freedom than working parents and less need for fixed periods of time off:

“Flexibility in the true sense – being able to do things at the drop of a hat, like go away for a long weekend without planning hugely in advance.”

However, helping out other family members was becoming increasingly necessary, for example, looking after a sick partner, making more regular visits to an elderly parent living in Australia or helping with grandchild care for a working daughter. Concern was expressed that caring for grandchildren was becoming an increasing expectation, due to the lack of suitable, affordable childcare provision. While people were happy to do a certain amount of care out of choice, this new pressure meant postponing their hopes for greater ‘free time’.

“For some of our friends it (childcare) is now a full-time role which is wearing them out. With older families, it means parents are less able to care for grandchildren. My retired husband will step in and look after my grandchild sometimes. With my mother I would flex my day to help her – as I did when caring for my aunt.”

## Transitioning beyond City limits

| 18-30<br>(Generation Y) | 31-44<br>(Generation X) | 45-63<br>(Baby Boomers) | 64-69<br>(Silent Generation) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 10                      | 10                      | 10                      | 10                           |

### What kind of flexible working?

This group were chiefly of the Baby boomer generation but some people had already passed the official retirement age (born during the second world war, sometimes labelled the ‘Air Raid Generation’ in the UK).

Most were already using flexible working either formally or informally. Some simply wanted to work shorter hours because they chose – and could now afford – to do so. Some had clear plans for new directions or expected to take on increasing caring responsibilities for a loved one. Some people were already splitting their time between commuting to the City and other activities (one was teaching occasional weekend courses, another had a smallholding). For older participants, flexible working was a way to wind down towards retirement or to continue contributing in later years.

The appeal of flexible working for this group was having more autonomy over their time to pursue interests previously put on hold: these could be new business

### Experiences at work

Some thought that people who worked part-time (rather than flexibly, full-time) were still treated with some suspicion, or neglected when it came to promotion or interesting work. Others found reduced hours mutually beneficial, especially in the downturn. However, attitudes were gradually changing about when and where people worked. People talked about ‘slowly moving away from face time’ and ‘management slowly being more about outputs’. Conversely, new technology meant that everything was speeding up due to the expectation to be available wherever and whenever. This had advantages and disadvantages as per the other groups.

“Flexible working is a benefit to global firms because we can take calls at all times.”

“The Blackberry life means you are never, ever free.”

A concern of this group (mainly senior people) was that



speed of delivery was taking precedent over quality and that there was a high drop out of good people, owing to the perceived lack of work-life balance for people at the top. This militated against reaching diversity targets and was also a serious threat to succession planning. If this impacted on future tendering, firms were in danger of 'withering on the vine'.

The group's personal experiences so far of working flexibly were generally very positive but there were a lot of comments about the ongoing management of it, both personally and organisationally.

"With changes of personnel, you have to go through this pain barrier explaining it (the part-time arrangement) to new managers."

"Where does time begin and end – maybe because I'm a man, I find it particularly hard to draw boundaries."

As well as managers' attitudes, a downside for people working part-time was that they felt guilty or concerned they might not be seen to be pulling their weight. As a result, they tended to put in a lot of extra hours, ending up working the equivalent of full-timers, without the same financial reward or recognition.

"You are doing a four day week so you get paid for four days – people forget you are paid less and resent you having 'days off'."

There was a danger that some employees could sabotage attitudes towards flexible working if they adopted a rigid attitude to work or made out that their 'rights' were more important than what worked for their team. Where they were able to show consideration, they were beneficial role models:

"Fridays can often be a bone of contention – we have one person who has other days in the week off and is flexible about it and he is respected for it."

Those over 50 in the focus group thought it would be helpful to talk with others about flexible working at this stage. But their perspective tended to be neglected because of the prevalence of younger workers.

"I suggested to HR that we have a group representing the over 50s but I was told there were too few of us to be worthwhile."

Some thought it would be good to be able to talk about greater flexibility as you approach retirement without feeling this would count against you. It would help if this discussion became an automatic part of the yearly appraisal. After the official retirement age, yearly reviews were favoured:

"Once you reach 65 you switch to a contract which is renewed yearly. A one yearly review seems a reasonable balance."

They thought the probability in the long term was a move towards more people working reduced percentages of time to save wage costs plus hotdesking to save space. This might be speeded up as a result of the recession and people might not want to return to full-time work in the City at a later date. However, in the short term, the recession also meant people felt they should be more visible in the office:

"People head for the centre of the herd in a recession. You don't want to be seen limping on the edge and being picked off."

### What people in this group had found helpful were:

- **Managers with positive attitudes to making flexibility work**
- **Managing this as a whole team issue and tackling any sense of unfairness about part-timers**
- **More case study examples to show it can work in the firm**
- **Independent help for individuals, not just EAPs which are still treated with suspicion**
- **Individuals showing consideration to others in planning flexible hours**

# The future

## Recommendations from all groups

We asked all our focus group participants for their views on what needed to happen next to help embed flexible working in their organisations. We also asked them what message they would like to give to their CEOs and what they themselves could do.

### 1. What organisations can do

Overall, the view was that organisations had taken major steps towards flexible working in recent years but there was still frustration about the pace of change and a sense that businesses were losing out as a result. Having looked at what was currently happening on the ground, all the focus groups were asked what they thought needed to happen next to help embed flexible working and make it work well for all sides:

The most frequently mentioned were:

- **More role models**
- **Leadership from the board or departmental head**
- **Managers to build greater competency around managing flexible working**
- **Change the City culture of indispensability and presenteeism**
- **Continue developing IT solutions to enable people to work differently**
- **Foster mutually supportive teams where flexible working benefits everyone**
- **Create networks internally or across City organisations to exchange experiences on flexible working**

### 2. What CEOs can do

While HR were seen as playing an important part, key to embedding flexible working in the culture is leadership from the top. We asked our participants to write down on post-it notes what message they would like to give to CEOs. The most frequent point was about the business benefits:

- **Flexible working is motivational for employees, leading to happier clients**

Other recurring comments were:

- **Cascade the message about this from the top and sell the business benefits to other senior managers**
- **Make it mandatory for managers to discuss flexible working in planning and appraisals – don't leave it to employees to have to ask**
- **Help to highlight examples of role models and recruit more part-timers into senior posts**
- **Practise what you say and walk the talk**
- **Make it OK to care so people aren't afraid to ask about this**
- **Elder care is a growing issue which needs your support**
- **Don't lose focus in the downturn**
- **Keep up the good work**

### 3. What individuals can do themselves

One of the most common observations was the importance of learning from others how to work flexibly effectively. Individuals need to manage the demands they place on themselves and be proactive in putting forward workable solutions. Typical suggestions were:

- **Be responsible and accountable about hours**
- **Show more appreciation for own firm's flexibility**
- **Be flexible about your flex**
- **Be less hard on self in terms of hours worked**
- **Work where there are supportive managers**
- **Keep work-life high on the team agenda**
- **Make sure communications are good**

- 
- **Be more confident and up front suggesting ideas**
  - **Be 'proud not paranoid' and if you are doing a good job, stop feeling the need to apologise**
  - **If you are a very driven person, set gentle boundaries, don't try to 'do it all'**
  - **Mentor others**
  - **Hone self-management skills**
  - **Be supportive and a good negotiator at work and at home**
  - **Challenge perceptions, come up with solutions**
  - **Be prepared to ask for help sometimes**
  - **Overcome self-limiting beliefs**
  - **Don't be over perfectionist**
  - **Be prepared to give up control and delegate more tasks**

## Section 3

# Employee case studies and tips

## Sam

### Consultant in a global organisation

**Current status:** Full-time hours. Leaves early on Fridays for a few weeks during the winter, making up the time on other weekdays or on Sundays.

**Background:** As an Orthodox Jew, observing Shabbat, the 'day of rest' from sundown on Fridays until Saturday night is important. During winter months, this means leaving work early in order to return home by sunset. Other events in the Jewish calendar are taken off as holiday leave.

**Workability:** As a graduate recruit, as soon as I was offered a job, I laid my cards on the table and was honest about my beliefs, explaining about why this was important and how work would be covered. The response from my project manager and other team members has been both respectful and supportive. The culture of the organisation counts for a lot. It is one which supports a reasonable approach to work time and you don't feel you have to keep your seat warm after hours if there is nothing to do. Part of being a team is give-and-take – colleagues know I will cover for them in return for the occasional need on a Friday. Provided the situation is explained, clients have always been accommodating, especially when they understand that anything urgent can still be completed by Monday morning. When it comes to other religious festivals, the benefit goes two ways as I'm happy to cover for other colleagues at times like Christmas.

**Challenges:** Not met any with clients or managers. This may be because Friday afternoons tend to be quieter as most people want to get away then. Travel is the biggest consideration. When away on a project in the UK, I work late on Thursday evening and start early on Friday morning in order to leave earlier and be home by sunset. When abroad on an assignment, it is a case of staying over on Friday and attending synagogue there, before travelling home on Saturday night or Sunday morning.

### Tips:

- **If you want something, it is usually possible to work around the situation, provided you are open about it**
- **Be flexible in putting in the hours at other times**

- **Show willingness to help others when they need time off**
- **Show your appreciation for having your values respected by thanking your manager and colleagues when appropriate**
- **Plan ahead and put contingencies in place so that you don't inconvenience others**

## Vijay

### Wealth Manager, banking

**Current Status:** Working full-time

**Background:** A bit of flexibility is important right now as his baby son has not been well. He wanted to be able to help out a bit more at home and take his daughter to school sometimes to ease the pressure on his wife.

**Workability:** My work involves quite a lot of travel as I deal with clients abroad. Until recently, even when not travelling, I was expected to come in early and work late at the office. Despite having a work station at home, my supervisor did not support the idea of homeworking. In a previous role in the Far East, I would catch up with work from home and while on the move. This did not have a detrimental effect on clients as most of the work was done over the phone anyway. Provided clients can get in touch when they need to, it doesn't matter where you are. Recording conversations is a consideration if you are not at the office, but we do not have so many calls each day that you cannot make notes later on, even if you have taken a call on the mobile whilst travelling.

**Challenges:** A lot depends on one's senior and I am on my sixth since starting my current role 18 months ago. Explaining about one's family situation is hard when you have to do it again and again. My wife is not working and perhaps there is an assumption with some managers that she is on hand to cover the domestic end of things. My current supervisor is more flexible than the previous ones, which is important right now as I'm at last able to give my wife a bit more support while our son settles.



## Tips:

- Work where you have a supportive manager
- It doesn't matter where you are so much as that you are available when clients need you
- Try suggesting a short term period of flexible working. This could help take the pressure off at home and also prove that it can be done from a client perspective
- Having flexible childcare helps
- Working four days is better than three – one day off is almost invisible – particularly if it is flexible
- Be highly focused – you have to justify yourself, not expect other people to support you
- Be professional – don't use family or other needs as excuses, stick to work related information
- Try and have a good relationship with manager – it is good to offload to a manager – some managers are better than others – not a gender things but about individual attitudes
- You must ensure that you organise your work so nobody else is disadvantaged by your part-time status

## Janine

### Portfolio Manager for the asset management division of an investment bank

**Current Status:** four days per week – day off is flexible  
**Background:** Had planned to resign after maternity leave for first child who had severe cerebral palsy, but was pleasantly surprised when firm suggested 2.5 day week. Janine has had two more children, two promotions and has continued to work part-time ever since.

**Workability:** Using a Blackberry enables you to keep in touch with your team. Good processes must be in place so it is easy to see what has happened on day out of office. As a manager it can be a challenge being in less than other team members: you need to earn the respect of your colleagues and have someone to deputise.

**Challenges:** Sometimes people think that working part-time means you are not interested in advancement, or credible for promotion. When I first applied for promotion, I was rejected because my profile wasn't very high. However, at the second attempt, I was promoted to VP thanks to our organisation's fair appraisal process.

## Tips:

- I never take for granted how my employer has helped me and always try my best in return
- Be flexible and available, don't resent a call on a non-work day – flex works both ways

## Hamish

### Senior role in IT support for a management consultancy

**Current Status:** 8am – 1pm and evenings four days per week, 8am – 4pm one day per week

**Background:** Flexibility enables visits to father in a home in the afternoons Initially when father was ill, was taking two hours annual leave each day. Line manager suggested discussion with HR rep to find workable solution.

**Workability:** Work is very understanding, so there has been no corner to defend. It helps having a long track record of good performance. Other members of the IT team cover in the afternoons and I cover the phones in the evening from home – responding to situations when they arise. Benefit to the company is longer hours of cover, extended from 8am – 5pm to 8am – 8pm but with no extra cost. I make extensive use of instant messenger, including keeping an eye on it in the evenings. The success of this depends on having reliable colleagues, who keep an eye on the job queue and keep me posted. There is also a policy of never a single point of failure/ contact in system is maintained. It is beneficial that my

own manager supports a culture of people working from home, so there is less resistance than might be the case elsewhere. You don't have to be seen to be at your desk all the time.

**Challenges:** Finding time for relaxation and other interests. My boss sometimes has to nag me about taking annual leave for a proper break.

## Tips:

- **Prior to requesting a change, dispassionately write down business case, outline what is the plan and how it benefits both individual and organisation**
- **HR suggested flexible working, discuss it in detail and organise a trial period (three months), then have a review**
- **When working flexibly, make sure processes and procedures are in place**
- **Trust colleagues but keep a close eye yourself on developments**
- **Innovative working can be difficult for others to accept, handle it intelligently and be flexible to show how well it can work**
- **Manage people's expectations – what may initially be described as an emergency may be a mere inconvenience – have the confidence to make the right judgment**

## Gemma

### Solicitor, law firm

**Current Status:** three days per week (Wednesday-Friday) as part of a job-share. Open-ended days, not fixed hours. Both job-sharers work Wednesdays and have a 20 minute handover at the beginning of the day.

**Background:** Job-sharing enabled Gemma and her job-share partner to combine work with caring for young

families. Since the job-share began in 2006, both have had additional periods of maternity leave.

**Workability:** One of the barriers to other forms of flexible working, when it comes to fee earners, relates to the importance of ensuring continuity of client care. In making our application to job share, we pointed out that we would both be working three long days and neither of us were seeking fixed hours, meaning we could ensure the same level of coverage as a full-time fee earner. During the first few months we did encounter some resistance from clients who had not previously experienced this type of arrangement. Fortunately we had a supportive partner who helped smooth the way and entrusted us with high quality work. We repaid this trust by providing a high quality service and have been able to demonstrate that a job-share arrangement can work.

**Challenges:** As a solicitor, as well as my client work, there is the need to participate in extra-curricular activities: participating in business development, giving presentations, raising one's personal profile as well as that of my department etc. plus attending training, and keeping up to date with developments in know-how. It can be a struggle to fit in these additional activities.

## Tips:

- **If entering into a job-share arrangement, choose your partner carefully: they need to share your work ethic, capabilities and goals**
- **Try and be flexible, within reason, in terms of occasional intrusions into non-working days**
- **Use a Blackberry to keep up to speed with developments on the days not worked so that there is not a mass of emails on your return to the office**
- **Be open to clients and make sure your organisation is supportive of the arrangement too**

## Davina

### Senior technical business support role in a bank

**Current Status:** three days per week (April-September), five days per week (October-March). Bonus, which is discretionary, is related to contribution during this period.

**Background:** After 30+ years of a working career decided over last three years to do a mix of full-time and part-time work, depending on the time of year. The proposal was made by Davina, based on the business area, where it was feasible to stagger the requirements around the established annual cycle.

**Workability:** Good communication within a small team (especially my deputy) ensured that any urgent issues can be covered in my absence. At the same time, in order for this to work, it was essential to be able to check emails, even on non-working days. This was to deal with urgent calls or urgent issues, particularly because of the global aspect of the work. Another reason for picking up calls was that I was under pressure from senior management not to make flexible arrangements overt – ie no “out of the office” message on voicemail or email. Hence the need to respond in the same timeframe as full-time colleagues.

**Challenges:** If one’s employer wants to keep the flexible arrangement private, it effectively means that you have to be “on call”, even on non-working days. However well planned the arrangement, there may be de-railers, typically non planned projects or the changing of process timetables. Inevitably, demands on the business may be too much for the arrangement to work and if this persists, it may be time to think again and go for a total lifestyle change.

### Tips:

- By having Mondays and Thursday as non-working days, means never out of the office for two consecutive days – these may not be the first choice of days but it is a good workable solution as never out of touch with what is going on at work
- Access to office emails by either Blackberry (preferred) or remote access is essential

- Willingness to be flexible on personal arrangements and to rearrange diary at relatively short notice
- Visible support from line manager – particularly with other senior functional and business colleagues
- Get support from team members for your proposal and support their work-life balance too

## Anita

### Assistant to a senior manager in a bank

**Current Status:** Currently full-time, but arrangements made on an ad hoc basis.

**Background:** The need to care for parents (separated, living apart) including helping mother to move into sheltered accommodation nearby, has meant, at times, arranging for flexi-time, particularly shorter days.

**Workability:** I do not have a PC at home so rely heavily on my Blackberry. I sometimes have to leave work at short notice, but am still able to pick up messages and deal with urgent matters using a Blackberry whilst on the move. My boss and other colleagues have been very helpful and I go out of the way to reciprocate.

**Challenges:** It can be difficult for a 30 year old colleague at work to understand the needs of 50 year old with elderly parents. Elder care does not have the same status as maternity leave or caring for children.

### Tips:

- Try and find colleagues who understand the situation – just for mutual understanding and support
- Plan ahead. At work, notify colleagues of potential difficulties before they occur, keep in touch and keep work up to date while away
- Although it is difficult to impossible to plan for a sudden bereavement, it may be possible to plan in advance for elder care

- Find out as much as possible from health professionals, to work out what sort of care the elderly person may need/be entitled to. Be proactive – if you don't take the lead, often nothing happens – ask for meetings with professionals – eg the intermediate care team and social worker, get a good GP for self
- Look for support groups – either via internet or in the company – HR no longer has a pastoral role, so find other support or join a network of like-minded people

## Tips:

- Become master of a portable lap top before starting to split work between the office and home – the Blackberry is less useful because you can't access your archive folders or some attachments whilst on the move
- Maintain your networks regularly or they can disintegrate quickly if you have no natural way of getting to know old contacts' successors
- Stay in the loop by accepting invitations to talk or contribute ideas
- If you want to continue to add value, you need to keep abreast of key developments and the people who will be taking the decisions

## Robert

### Non-executive Director, banking

**Current Status:** Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays: two days a week for organisation plus one day as non-executive chair of an education authority. Wound down to this gradually as external non-executive commitments developed. From this year, will stop advisory role at work and continue to focus on external non-executive role.

**Workability:** My case was a deliberate experiment on the part of the bank and myself. This way of working means they kept the knowledge and experience accumulated with the group over a period of many years. It has meant that as well as contributing my experience at work, I've been able to work on a special educational project which will continue once I retire. It also gives me a long weekend to catch up on other activities and spend time with my partner, going to exhibitions, on walks or playing golf. I've also taken up learning to play the piano.

**Challenges:** The difficulty is a personal challenge rather than others' attitudes. It is hard fitting everything into three days and I usually end up coming in to the office on Thursdays too. Sheer volume of detail and the overuse of email makes it difficult to switch off completely for sustained levels of time. On Thursday evenings you are rushing round trying to finish everything off because you won't be in again till Monday.

## Kirstie

### Associate Lawyer (transactions)

**Current Status:** Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays  
Background: Already a senior City lawyer when she returned to work after maternity leave. Kirstie's baby is currently cared for by granny. Longer term, baby will go to a day nursery in the same building as the office.

**Workability:** Having my mother to hand and a supportive husband (with a similar career) who is home early on Wednesdays means I can work late if necessary sometimes. Delegation and good management of junior associates is key to a successful arrangement. Having a supportive manager is also vital. You have to have lots of strategies and be confident that it will work – a negative attitude and worrying about clients would make it harder to operate at your best. I have done my fair share of long hours and hard work and junior colleagues respect that. Junior staff want and need interesting work. I try to 'let go' and involve people at a more junior level and as a consequence, am well supported.

**Challenges:** There are very few women in senior transactional roles. Having an employer with a strategy for retention and progression of women helps. Other



workplaces may be much less supportive. But ultimately it is down to the individual to make it work for the business. Businesses aren't charities so you have to go in making a great case. Finding good, reliable, flexible childcare is a challenge – a successful arrangement is about give-and-take, so you need to have reliable arrangements and be prepared to work additional hours or non-working days.

## Tips:

- **Analyse own management skills – if you want junior staff to be loyal, work hard and be supportive then, when possible, give them work which helps their development and which is interesting**
- **Be very organised – plan (as much as possible) each week, so that other people are always aware of what is going on**
- **Manage your manager – be clear about what you can do and what you can't**
- **Keep a firm and open relationship with clients – collaboratively develop the scope of work and then staff accordingly**
- **Be honest about when you are available and how contactable in emergencies**
- **Live close to the office. If you live outside London and are reliant on a nursery that closes at 6pm, you have less flexibility**

## Joe

### Trader, global investment markets

**Current Status:** three day week (starting about 6.45am and finishing about 5.15pm)

**Background:** Worked a five day week previously, doing similar daily hours and cut back for family reasons.

**Workability:** I wasn't sure how my company would react to my request as it was not something I was aware had

been done in my division before. Initially I spoke to my manager, who guided me through the official process with someone from HR. They were both extremely helpful and stuck to the official timelines for responding to my request. They were very accommodating and agreed to the specific days of the week requested. (I had said I could be flexible if needed in both my actual job and days I worked). One of my biggest concerns was how the rest of the desk would react to me working part-time, but they have all been very understanding.

**Challenges:** On a personal basis, I found it difficult initially accepting I would not be working every day and other people on the desk would be looking after my clients for those days. This has become easier as the weeks have gone on, but I still feel guilty for the days I am not in and feel I have to work harder on the days I am. This is not something the company have made me feel, just how I feel personally.

## Tips:

- **Be as flexible as possible in what you request**
- **On the days I don't work, I still read and respond to emails from home and keep up to date on what is happening**

## Teresa

### Senior HR Manager in law firm

**Current Status:** Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays – only log in from home on Mondays and Tuesdays if something important comes up.

**Background:** Started in a senior position at the firm three years ago, aged 52 and went part-time one year ago. This allows for various interests, including creative writing and some weekend training courses. The HR director was very helpful in accommodating a request: there was a team redesign taking place and this provided an opportunity.

**Workability:** Much of my work is specific or one-off projects which can be picked up and put down again

during the three days in the office. The Blackberry helps to keep in touch, but I find it important to be firm about what is urgent and what can wait until the next work day and I keep separate mobiles and email addresses for work and non-work contacts. Colleagues, some of whom also have flexible arrangements, are very supportive. Having colleagues who can call you if necessary is essential. A manager on the same wavelength is a great bonus. Being slightly removed from the day-to-day has allowed me to be more focused, better organised and more imaginative in devising work solutions. Being less tired has made a real difference.

**Challenges:** Getting over the positives to the rest of the company.

## Tips:

- **Plan carefully, consult with colleagues before taking proposal to manager, so kinks in plan can be highlighted and ironed out**
- **If you are moving to a part-time flex pattern with a reduction in pay, think through the financial implications carefully – it is easy to be over optimistic about how much money you will need**
- **Be flexible – flex works both ways and some times of the year are busier than others**
- **Be organised – make sure other people know what you are doing and make sure everyone knows where your filing is and can access it**
- **Put yourself in other's shoes and think about the impact of your absence – if you leave a message on email and ansaphone saying who to contact in your absence, consider how it impinges on colleagues**
- **Try to have someone who plays a mentoring role to talk to in confidence**

## Phillip

### Facilities Director, law firm

**Current Status:** In office midday Monday to midday Friday, but works during travel time.

**Background:** Made redundant some years ago and brought forward a plan to move to Scotland. Found short term project work with current employer, working three days per week in the office, and two days at home. Coincidentally, at the end of the project, the person doing my current role left and I was offered the role. I commute weekly from Scotland, arriving in the office from midday Monday and leaving Friday midday, with additional work done whilst travelling.

**Workability:** Email via my Blackberry and my mobile enables me to work whilst in transit. I use travel time to draft contracts and read reports and other lengthy documents without the normal office interruptions. During the working week in London I start early and leave late on my three full days.

**Challenges:** Managing expectations and workload can be a challenge – does fewer hours in the office mean less work? My way of working is accepted in my firm, but a pioneer might need a thicker skin and a flexible approach in order for it to work for all parties. I sometimes feel guilty with my arrangement, but this is a personal challenge as flexible working was unknown in my early professional life. I've had to overcome a strong sense of delineation between home and office.

## Tips:

- **There needs to be a change of attitude by you, your employer and work colleagues**
- **The best way to illustrate that it works well, is to show it with a trial period**
- **Working from home needs discipline, but with fewer peripheral interruptions, it is good for some types of work, such as writing reports**
- **It is good to be in the office on a regular basis – out of sight is out of mind, and it is good to interact with colleagues/team**

# Participating Firms

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**Addleshaw Goddard**

**Allen & Overy**

**Baker & McKenzie**

**British Bankers Association**

**Capgemini**

**Citi**

**Credit Suisse**

**Herbert Smith LLP**

**KPMG**

**PricewaterhouseCoopers**

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## About Working Families

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**Working Families** is the UK's leading work-life balance charity. It supports and gives a voice to working parents and carers, whilst also helping employers create workplaces which encourage work-life balance for everyone.

Working Families helps parents and carers understand their rights and to negotiate for change at work, and also encourages employers to grasp the real business benefits that work-life balance practice can bring. Informed by all it hears from and knows of its individual and employer members, its research and its legal advice work, it is able to argue authoritatively for social policy and workplace change that will benefit anyone with family.

To find out more visit:

[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

**Balance At Work** is the consulting arm of Working Families, delivering expert and practical solutions to employers, enabling them to leverage the benefits of work-life balance, and especially flexible working, practices.

Contact us to see how we can help you:

[kirstie.axtens@workingfamilies.org.uk](mailto:kirstie.axtens@workingfamilies.org.uk)



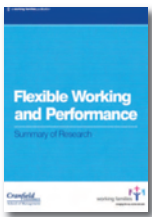
## Other publications for employers



### **Legal Lives Retaining Talent Through A Balanced Culture**

The research examines culture and practice in thirteen leading law firms and establishes arguments and approaches to culture change. It highlights successful projects and initiatives and proposes additional measures that could work for the sector.

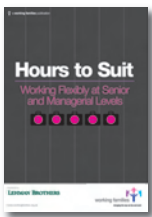
Price: £40 (£30 for public and voluntary sector organisations)



### **Flexible Working And Performance**

This summary presents the key findings from the combined results of the seven organisations which participated in this two year joint research project between Cranfield School of Business and Working Families. What impact does flexible working have on performance?

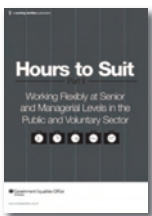
Price: £40 (£30 for public and voluntary sector organisations)



### **Hours To Suit Working Flexibly At Senior & Managerial Levels**

Can you work flexibly in a senior role? Can you be a manager and have a work-life balance? This groundbreaking research from Working Families includes detailed interviews with 23 senior executives who are working in a variety of ways, overturning the myth that top jobs can't be done flexibly.

Price: £40 (£30 for public and voluntary sector organisations)



### **Hours To Suit Part II**

Examines senior flexible work patterns in the public and voluntary sectors. The 19 case studies reflect the diversity of ways in which senior roles can be redesigned on a flexible basis and the wide range of organizations in which such arrangements are working successfully.

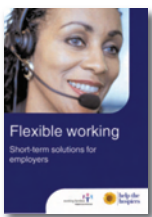
Price: £25 (£18.75 for public and voluntary sector organisations)



### **Moving Mountains: The Culture Change Challenge**

This invaluable report examines how organisations can move from having flexible working policies, to a culture where work-life balance measures are truly embedded. Based on detailed interviews with 10 leading employers in the City, this report offers a road map to a truly flexible workplace.

Price: £20 (£15 for public and voluntary sector organisations)



### **Flexible Working: Helping employees with short-term caring responsibilities**

Produced in conjunction with Help The Hospices, this booklet looks at how employers can help employees looking after someone with a life limiting or terminal illness. Drawing from best practice, it suggests small things that can make a difference, as well as flexible working and special leave options.

Price: £5 (free to carers)

Working Families members get a **25% discount** on publication orders.

Contact us for further discounts on bulk orders.

Buy online at our shop at [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)





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With grateful thanks to: **Chris Parke, Talking Talent**

ISBN: **1 870878 48 5**

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Registered Charity No 1099808  
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Designed by: **MWA Design**

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