

Shifting attitudes to flexible working
and childcare for working parents



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Foreword

* All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 500 Senior HR decision makers (fieldwork was undertaken between 2nd - 10th January 2020. The survey was carried out online) and 1,000 Employees (fieldwork was undertaken between 2nd - 7th January 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of British business size). Respondents work for organisations from a wide range of sectors that range in size (from 1 to over 250 employees). Most are based in the UK, although we interviewed one HR director in Denmark. Of the employees surveyed 52% are male, 48% are female. 21% are over 55, 25% are 45-54, 23% are 35-44 and 31% are under 35.

A key issue for our clients is the changing priorities of the workforce and the increased importance of work/life balance and as new mothers ourselves and working flexibly, we have a particular interest in this area.

We have seen considerable changes in recent years with workers wanting more flexibility in how they work and families using different family leave arrangements rather than the "traditional" arrangement of the mother taking maternity leave and remaining the primary carer. We have also seen a shift in attitudes from employers with many being more receptive to flexible working and encouraging "non-traditional" leave arrangements, for example, by offering enhanced shared parental leave pay.

We decided to carry out research to give us some concrete evidence to back up what we have been seeing anecdotally for years and to help inform and educate our clients on how to keep up with changing demands. To be talent magnets and retain good people, businesses need to look at what their workforce want and expect and what flexible practices/family friendly entitlements they can offer.

Our research involved surveying 1000 employees and 500 HR decision makers in a YouGov survey and holding 12 in-depth interviews with HR decision makers and founders during January 2020*. We also consulted an expert in this field, Dr Jana Javornik, Associate Professor of Work and Employment Relations at Leeds Business School, regarding certain areas of our research.

There are clearly challenges for employers and employees in making flexible working work. One of the most interesting aspects of our research was, therefore, to find out about how successful flexible working has been in organisations, the innovative working practices that businesses have introduced, and what the major challenges have been and how to overcome them.

We hope that you find the results just as interesting and informative as we did.

Louise, Harriet and Ellie

Executive summary

We received an overwhelmingly positive response to flexible working in our research: **Almost 60%** of HR decision makers told us that flexible working arrangements had been **highly successful** within their business. The results also evidenced that offering flexible working is now a **key factor in recruitment and retention**, with **nearly 3/4 of employees and employers** surveyed saying how important it was in order to attract and retain the best talent.

The **majority of employees regardless of age** said that flexible working was important to them for remaining in their role or choosing a new role. The statistics were higher amongst the younger generations but our results show flexible working is still an important consideration for employees aged 45-54 and over 55 too.

We expected more women than men to state that flexible working was important to them but what was interesting was that the **majority of men said that flexible working was important** to them remaining in their role (**66%**) or choosing a new role (**64%**).

We received some fascinating responses about the different approaches employers are taking to flexible working, with some implementing formal changes across the organisation, for example, offering flexi-time to all employees where they can choose the hours they work around set core hours. Others had a more informal flexible working approach, for example, encouraging working from home, but leaving arrangements to be agreed between employees and their managers. What is also apparent from our research is that employers are more open to allowing people to fit their work round their life (and childcare responsibilities), rather than life fitting around work.

Obviously many types of flexible working, in particular working from home, are vulnerable to abuse and a **lack of trust** was one of the main concerns which employers cited in our surveys about offering flexible working to all (**23% of respondents**). The key to overcoming this issue we found was good communication between employers and managers and measuring performance based on output, rather than hours spent at a desk.

In relation to how working parents are sharing childcare, our research evidenced a noticeable shift away from the traditional model of the mother staying at home and being the primary carer, with more parents, as well as those who plan to have children in the future, wanting to share childcare more equally both at the early stages through shared parental leave but also after both parents return to work. **17% of employees** said that they planned to take **shared parental leave for future children**. In circumstances where 55% of those surveyed said that they did not plan to have any children in the future, **the real figure is actually 38%** which is huge progress on the current take up of shared parental leave (**7%**) and greater equality in childcare.

We are delighted by the results of our research and to see how attitudes are changing, as well as to learn what a positive impact implementing flexible working can have on businesses and their employees.



Although particularly important to employees under 44 (74% - under 35 and 77% - aged 35-44), having the availability of flexible working is important to employees of all ages for remaining in their current role (67% - aged 45-54 and 67% aged 55+).



Having access to flexible working is important to men as well as women (66% of men said it was an important factor in remaining in their current role compared to 77% of women).



HR decision makers consider that a lack of trust in employees is a significant barrier to working flexibly (23% of those surveyed said this was a barrier).



Despite a low take up to-date of shared parental leave amongst employees surveyed (7%), of those planning to have children in the future 38% plan to use shared parental leave.



57% of HR decision makers surveyed have found flexible working to be **highly successful** within their business.



72% of HR decision makers stated that offering flexible working was important in attracting and retaining their business' employees.



71% of employees surveyed said that having the availability of flexible working is important to them for remaining in their current role.

Why employers need to embrace flexible working: it is fast becoming a key factor in attracting and retaining talent

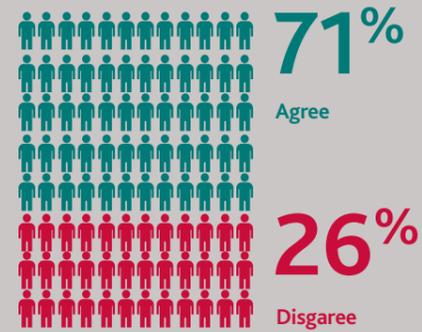
In recent years in our work as employment lawyers we have seen employees becoming much more concerned about having flexibility at work. The YouGov survey results confirm this, with 71% of employees stating that flexible working is important when deciding whether to stay in their current role, as opposed to 26% of employees who did not agree. Similarly, when choosing a new role, 69% of employees felt the availability of flexible working was important, compared with 26% who did not.

The survey of employers was consistent with these results with 72% of HR decision makers confirming that flexible working is an important aspect in recruitment and retention of staff, and only 26% of participants feeling it was not.

In our interviews with HR decision makers, there was a common acceptance that flexibility is something people now expect and that embracing it can be a significant benefit to their organisations, even giving them a competitive edge. One issue which did come out of the interviews was how to publicise and capitalise on the degree of flexibility offered to employees, particularly where (as in some cases) flexible working is agreed informally, comes in many different forms and is not enshrined in a policy document. Employers want to be able to shout about what they can offer and about the amount of flexibility they give their workforce, but a blanket flexible working arrangement or approach may not be suitable for all types of roles and departments within the business.

Employees:

How important is having the availability of 'flexible working' to you for remaining in your current role?



*3% don't know

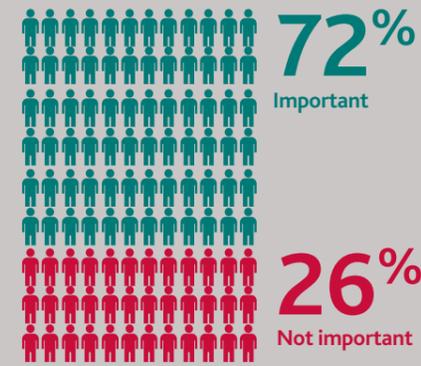
How important is having the availability of 'flexible working' to you for choosing a new role to move to?



*5% don't know

HR decision makers:

How important, if at all, do you think offering flexible working is for the recruitment and retention of your business' employees?



*2% don't know

“What employees want from work is changing, so expect fewer questions about bonus opportunity and the time it takes to to get promoted, and more on whether they can work on an agile basis, whether there is flexibility to work outside of the core 9-5 hours, and what your company’s position is on Sabbaticals.”

Jordan Barry, Motor Insurers’ Bureau

“Flexible working is important in attracting and retaining talent – people want it and want to be treated like adults. Our reputation for flexible working has led to a significant amount of interest from prospective employees. An article about Modo25’s working policies in the Yorkshire Post attracted 100+ CVs – meaning that there is no need for us to pay recruiters.”

John Readman, Modo25

“The flexibility we offer has been a real talking point with senior hires – and has helped retain staff – particularly high performers as they know they will likely lose that flexibility if they go elsewhere.”

Charlotte Theodom, Varo Partners

“We have seen an increase in requests for sabbaticals over the past 12 months. Sabbaticals are important for retention and we have changed our approach when considering these requests - we have a young workforce in hard to fill roles where skills are in demand and when weighing the risk of people leaving, it is much better to have them go off travelling and return re-energised and re-engaged than lose them.”

James Burr, Thames Clipper



Wide-ranging approaches employers are taking to flexible working

Through our interviews with HR decision makers and business owners we were encouraged to see some innovative and forward thinking approaches to working flexibly. Of course, when we think about flexible working we often think of remote working, but it also comes in various other forms, including staggered hours, shorter hours, part-time work, job-shares and flexi-time.

Unsurprisingly, the extent to which flexible working can be embraced is to a certain extent dictated by the particular industry and their business model. For instance, start-up Fintech organisations are better able to adapt their working styles to suit the “modern employee” than large traditional law firms whose clients expect them to be available 24-7. That said, even those organisations operating within a more traditional business model, that would ordinarily require staff to be at their desk 9-5, are recognising that they need to adapt to the changing times, in order to keep up with the competition, meet the needs of the younger generations who expect to be able to work flexibly and keep and attract the best talent. It is interesting to see that often in organisations where staff are trusted to work as they wish, they predominantly still come into the office during broadly traditional working hours but having the option to work flexibly is something that is greatly appreciated.

Businesses seem to be taking different approaches as to whether or not they formalise their flexible working policies. There are clearly advantages to having a formal policy – it avoids uncertainty and allows businesses to promote their policies externally. Equally, some businesses appreciate having informal policies that they can use at their discretion.

We are pleased to see that the wellbeing of staff is often at the centre of these new policies, and that companies are going further than simply paying lip service to the concept of positive mental health in the workplace. It was also fascinating to interview an HR decision maker in Denmark, who, along with other Nordic countries, are well known for being progressive in their approach to ensuring a healthy work life balance. In this section of the report we look at some of the approaches businesses are taking in more detail, which you will hopefully be able to take inspiration from when considering how to best approach flexible working within your organisation.



Motor Insurers' Bureau
Jordan Barry

"The company is in the middle of transformation and we're basically changing everything - culture, capability, IT, systems and processes. Previously, culture was very "parent child", but it's becoming much more adult to adult which is great to see. We have applied agile working for every role possible, although roles in our front line require the introduction of new technology before we can transfer them. However, employees who are agile tend to work from home twice a week and agree their working patterns on a weekly basis with their line manager, factoring in the personal elements like doctor's appointments and school pick-ups. At MIB we are encouraging a culture where employees are trusted to strike the right balance between their working lives and personal lives and we have seen increases in productivity and a change in behaviour as a result. Our recent employee engagement results shows that things are moving in the right direction."

AEG – Europe
Kirstie Loveridge

"We introduced a new formal agile working policy last April – for most of the business. It came about following a suggestion on our ideas board by an employee. Essentially staff work a seven-and-a-half-hour day and are able to be flexible about start and leave times, and can take up to 90 minutes for lunch, so long as they are in the office from 10am-4pm. This has gone down extremely well with employees. The reality is that most employees generally do still work 9-5 but they appreciate the flexibility being there, should they need it."

IO Interactive (Based in Denmark)
Signe Linneboe

"People flex all the time. There are core office hours of 9-4. It is common for people to change their hours and days and this is the typical office culture. It is seen as good for everyone that employees can balance their private life and employees really appreciate it. Working from home is generally welcomed in the Danish industry. It is very normal to have one day working from home, particularly where an employee has children."

Varo
Charlotte Theedom

"We have a flexible working approach, rather than a formal policy – which is open to all staff past entry level. For these employees there aren't fixed

hours, rather a set number of hours in a week that they are contracted to work. Staff are assessed on their output, rather than amount of time spent at their desk. Recognising that individual people have individual needs works very well for us – particularly with high performers. They appreciate the additional trust and having the freedom to work their working day around their clients' needs, and their own needs and lifestyle."



FinTech company
European Head of HR

"We have a culture of flexibility and flexible working is dealt with on a team by team basis, and most teams allow working from home. Staff are generally able to adjust their hours to fit in with their lives – for example, come in late or leave early in order to pickup or drop off children."

Modo25
John Readman

"The standard offering to all team members / colleagues is a four-day week on a full-time London-equivalent salary, despite the office being in Leeds. The

core hours are 10am-3pm each working day and any additional hours outside these times can be amended to suit the team member's needs. If you come in early you can leave early, but if you come in later you will leave later. If staff leave early, there is no-one checking that they log back in, it's all about trust. Modo25's approach to flexible working is outcome-based and it would become clear within a couple of weeks if the team member is not reaching its objectives. The company has a team lunch every couple of weeks and have an office dog who is walked by different team members every hour."



The Happiness Index
Matt Phelan

"The Happiness Index is led by its "Freedom to be Human" vision – it is outcome-based and fully flexible. There is no emphasis on presenteeism and culture is important. It is down to the employee's discretion and they could work from home all week if required. The guidelines provide core office hours of 10am-4pm,

but this is flexible and employees do not have to physically be in the office within that time (although most people do). The Happiness Index uses a gamer platform called Discord for "comms" (i.e. communication) and as a way to keep people updated through chatting. This also avoids people working from home from feeling isolated."



Pictet
Jennifer McGovern

"The "95%" model is available to employees, which is a way of awarding an extra 13 days of pro-rated annual leave. It's essentially "buying more time off" and should be taken as block leave. Employees have been using it to take long trips with family and to volunteer abroad. It originated from employees' ad hoc requests to buy additional annual leave and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee has decided to implement it globally. It has received a positive response in the last few months since it was introduced. This comes at a cost to the business but is very well received."

Mid-sized law firm
HR Director

"We have a formal working from home policy, whereby fee earners are encouraged to work from home on a fortnightly basis. Working from home has worked fantastically well. I would much prefer, if a member of my team has an appointment, that they can work from home rather than take a day's holiday. It is helpful for everyone."

Consultancy business
HR Manager

"We offer "flexi-time". The office is open from 8am-6pm and employees can choose their hours between those times. For example, employees could choose to work 8am-4pm or 10am-6pm, as long as they work the core eight hours. Staff can choose to have a standard work from home day or change the day each week to reflect their priorities for that week. The usual starting point for flexible working requests is "why not?". Start with flexibility and it's all done on an informal basis."



Barriers to flexible working: The employer and employee perspective

“The challenges have been in ensuring consistency in delivery across the board and managing under performers. We are still considering whether flexible working should be treated as a benefit and taken away from under performers. We need to consider this carefully, as sometimes flexible working is needed to get those not coping back on track.”

HR Manager, Recruitment Business

One of the key issues we focused on in our research was the barriers to flexible working, in order to try and better understand why some employers are reluctant to offer flexible working arrangements and some employees are reluctant to request or make use of them.

The graphs evidence that a principal concern for businesses (39%) and employees (20%) with flexible working is the impact that it has on **the ability to carry out the job effectively**.

However, whether a job can be carried out effectively on a flexible basis is understandably very dependent on the tasks undertaken by the employee. For example, a front of house receptionist could not work from home, or do flexi-time. Issues around confidentiality and sensitive data can also make flexible working arrangements more complicated. That said, flexible working comes in a number of different shapes and forms and for some it could be a later start or earlier finish. Therefore, our view is that in reality with some additional effort from employers to put the right arrangements or measures in place, the majority of jobs should be able to be carried out effectively with some degree of flexibility.

A lack of trust was something brought up in many of the interviews and in the survey, with 23% of HR decision makers citing trust as a barrier. Trust is not a concern for all types of flexible working of course, but when employees work from home or have autonomy over their working hours, it can be a major concern. One HR Director we interviewed mentioned that some managers still voice concerns that employees who choose to work from home on a Monday or a Friday may be abusing the system and treating the time like a three day weekend. These views are, fortunately, becoming less common. Mondays and Fridays as non-working days are more of a genuine concern as they lead to a three day period out of the office while a single day off midweek is often considered less disruptive. However, few employees (12%) said that they lacked motivation to work from home or would succumb to distractions. Trust is clearly a tricky challenge to overcome as it ultimately comes down to the relationship between an employee

“A challenge we face is to make sure there is still a sense of team and ensure that staff work collaboratively together. In my experience, working remotely works best when it is clearly communicated and understood by staff that when working from home you should work as if you are in the office – your phone must be diverted and you need to be available for meetings.”

HR Director, Mid-sized city law firm

“The main challenge initially was around convincing some senior managers who were concerned about trust.”

Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Entertainment Business

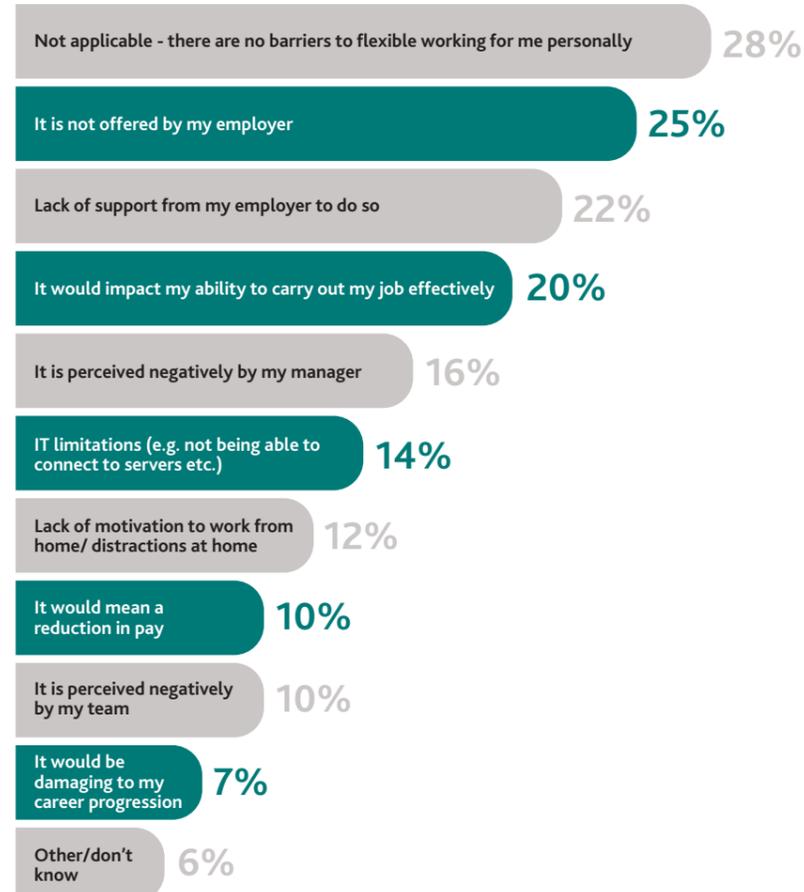
HR decision makers:

Which, if any, of the following do you think are barriers to employees working flexibly in your business?



Employees:

Which, if any, of the following are barriers to flexible working for you personally?

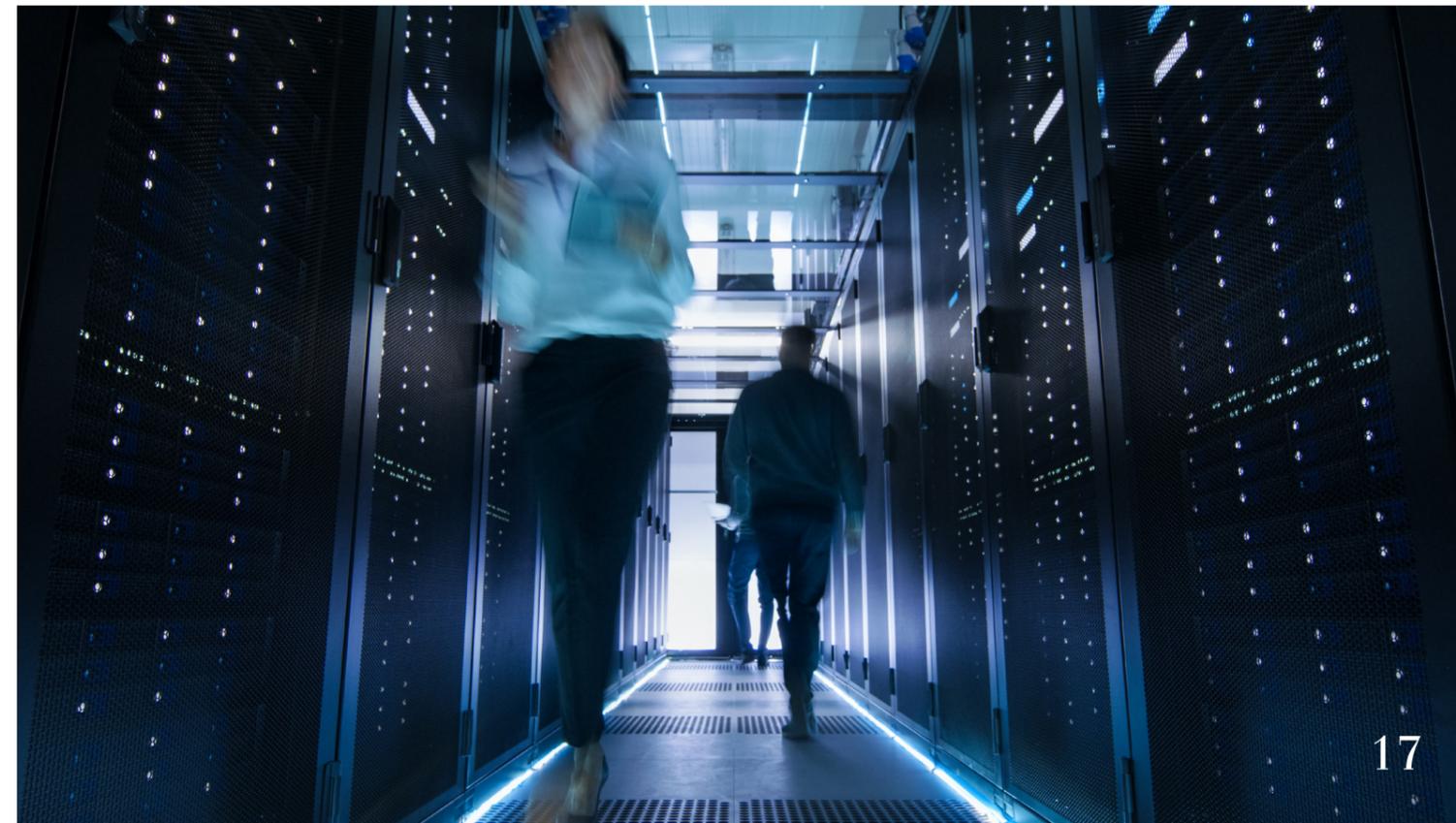


and their manager. An HR Manager we interviewed from a mid-sized city law firm suggested that the solution to this issue was to change the way in which staff are managed to ensure more frequent communication both ways about expected output, rather than relying on annual appraisals to feedback on performance.

Dr Jana Javornik pointed out the irony of these results, which is that trusting employees to work flexibly and more autonomously has been proven to benefit businesses. She told us that “trust, as an underlying cause or explanatory factor behind lack of flexible working, means that decision-making is driven by a narrow understanding of a sustainable and healthy workforce. There will always be people who will try to bypass the system, but research shows that workers who have access to flexible working know their employer cares about them and pay back with loyalty, extra hours, reduced absenteeism and increased retention. Namely, they feel grateful and want to pay this back for what they know is not taken for granted.” She also recommended that where there is a lack of trust, regular check in points could be made.

A large proportion of the employees surveyed cited a lack of support by their employers as a barrier to flexible working (22%) or that it would be perceived negatively by their team (10%) or manager (16%). In our view these statistics correspond with the lack of trust felt by employers as highlighted in the results. What is apparent therefore is that to overcome this barrier, flexible working needs to be perceived as acceptable for everyone in the organisation and not just for the most senior employees. Dr Jana Javornik commented that “as well as having clear company policies, you need line managers that are attuned to the senior management - it is of little help if a CEO is supportive of flexible working but this is not cascaded down, or when an organisation is not led by example and workers, even when flexible working is made available, do not perceive it is appropriate or acceptable.”

IT limitations was another notable issue cited by some businesses (20%) and employees (14%). If employees cannot remotely access the necessary systems and participate in daily activities, then clearly this will be a barrier to remote working, but this is something which we know can be overcome by employers investing in the right technology.



“We have certainly noticed a difference in expected working patterns between different generations. The younger generation – generation Y – are putting in requests for leaves of absences and sabbaticals. We are looking at this, as something we would like to be able to support. Interestingly, when we attempted to roll out a 7 day service, when staff were offered double pay to work over the weekend, there was very little interest in taking this up – as clearly a good work life balance is their main priority.”

**European Head of HR,
FinTech company**

“Most of the Senior Executives within the business are Generation X, who spent the early parts of their careers working long hours at their desks before being able to work flexibly. However these days there is the expectation from staff across the business, including from junior staff, that they can work flexibly regardless of their level of seniority.”

**Kirstie Loveridge,
AEG – Europe**

Differences in attitudes among different generations and genders

The majority of employees surveyed (regardless of their age) said that flexible working was important for them remaining in their new role or choosing a new role to move to. The age group with the highest percentage for how important flexible working was to them, was the age group 35-44, which is perhaps not surprising as this group are more likely to have child-care responsibilities.

A common theme from our interviews was that the younger generation expected more flexible working and were not afraid to put in requests. This is also evidenced by the results from our YouGov survey with 77% of under 35s saying that flexible working was important in choosing a new role to move to. However, what is also interesting is that flexible working is still seen as important for all generations with 63% of employees aged 45-54 and 53% of employees aged over 55 stating that flexible working was important in choosing a new role to move to.

Although some of our interviewees commented that older employees found it harder to adapt to changes as they had not traditionally been given the

opportunity of flexible working, others commented that when they were offered flexible working, this was a real benefit to them. This shows that flexible working policies should not just be geared to those with child care responsibilities and employers need to think about how to engage with employees of different generations in implementing their policies.

We have included in the boxes some quotes from our interviews about different attitudes to flexible working between different age groups.

Our survey found that flexible working was more important to women than men, which is unsurprising as currently most women still bear primary responsibility for childcare in our society. What we found interesting, however, was that a large proportion of men said that flexible working was important in: (a) their current role (66%) and (b) choosing a new role to move to (64%). From the interviews we carried out, we found that if flexible working practices were offered by businesses there was take up from men and women, with all ages and genders benefiting from flexible working.

“Gen Z and millennials want something more – flexibility and authentic leadership. For MIB, it’s our employees with less than four years’ service who are the most engaged and open to change - some employees remain extremely institutionalised and will require longer to change.”

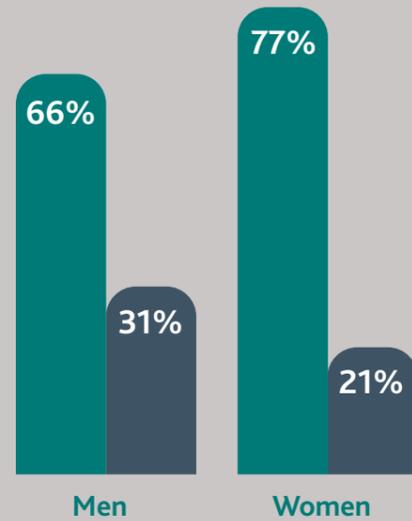
Jordan Barry, Motor Insurers’ Bureau

“It’s not all about salary/money – values have changed in the workplace and there has been a healthy shift in practice and culture. Generation Z and millennials expect flexible working and we would be at a competitive disadvantage if we didn’t offer it.”

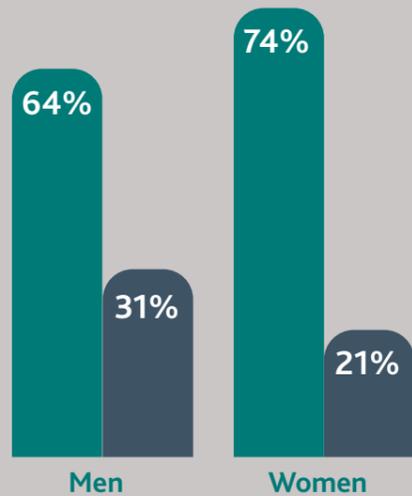
Jennifer McGovern, Pictet

GENDER DIFFERENCES

How important, if at all, is having the availability of 'flexible working' to you for remaining in your role?



How important, if at all, is having the availability of 'flexible working' to you for choosing a new role?

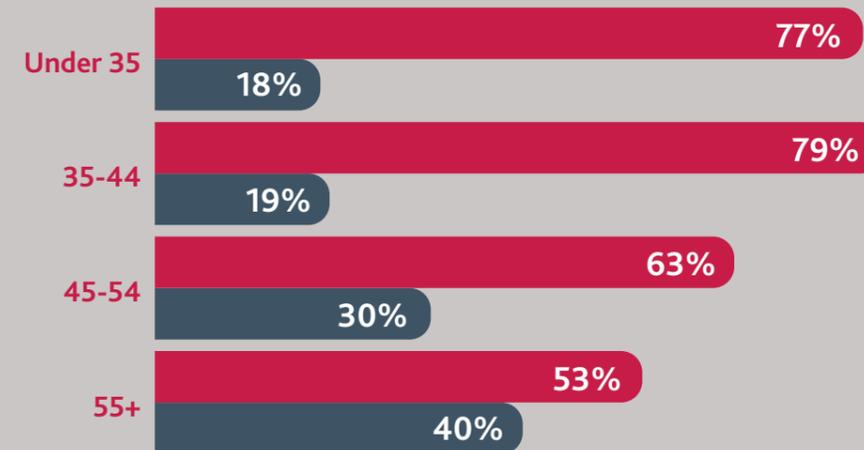


■ Important ■ Not Important

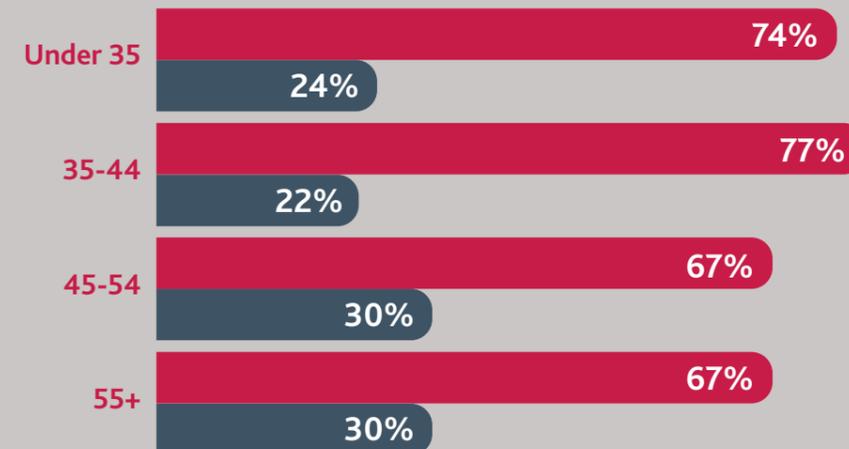


GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

How important, if at all, is having the availability of 'flexible working' to you for choosing a new role?



How important, if at all, is having the availability of 'flexible working' to you for remaining in your role?



■ Important ■ Not Important

WS

Attitudes towards shared parental leave and childcare now and in the future

Shared parental leave and pay was introduced in 2015 with the aim of giving parents a more flexible way to take leave during the first year after the birth of a child. Since its introduction take up has been low at around 4% of eligible couples (see the recent consultation document from the government: 'Good Work Plan: Proposals to support families'). Our own survey found that 7% of parents had utilised the shared parental leave scheme with the highest proportion coming from the age group under 35. Our interviewees have started to see an increase in shared parental leave requests.

Cultural change does take time and take-up of shared parental leave has also probably not been helped by the complexity of the statutory scheme, the fact it is low paid and that some organisations, whilst enhancing maternity pay, have chosen not to enhance shared parental leave pay.

As Dr Jana Javornik of Leeds Business School told us: "I'd be surprised if we didn't see an upwards trend, regardless of the policy character. But its uptake very much depends on whether workers perceive this as available and acceptable behaviour. With the increasing number of role models and media attention it is likely that more and more couples will share leave but only as long as the financial component allows equality and employers support an uptake. Otherwise,

"People operate their family lives in very different ways these days. Stay at home mothers are now in the minority, with most returning to work, whereas previously this was not the case. This clearly has a significant knock on effect on the workforce, with an increased uptake in shared parental leave and working hours being adapted in order to accommodate two working parents."

HR Manager, mid-sized law firm

fathers will continue to hide behind paid annual and sick leave instead. Employers will, however, need to make sure that, instead, they do not reduce extra-statutory rights for mothers, especially maternity pay, which we've seen happening."

What was promising from our YouGov survey was that 17% of those surveyed (with 33% of those being under 35) said that they would take shared parental leave in relation to the birth of a future child. When you take in account that 55% of respondents said that they did not plan to have any future children, the real figure is 38% and similar responses were given by both men and women so hopefully there will be an upward trend in the future.

The government is currently considering how to reform parental leave and pay for a number of reasons including trying to increase fathers'



"20% of maternity cases have taken shared parental leave over the last 2 and a half years."

HR Manager, Consultancy business

involvement in childcare and reduce the employment and gender pay gaps. One of the issues that the government is looking at is pay as there is evidence the rate of pay is a significant determinant for take-up of parental leave. There is also the wider issue of cultural expectations around the roles of men and women. Denmark and Sweden have been able to change these cultural expectations as a result of the parental leave and pay policies that they have in place. According to Signe Linneboe, HR Manager at IO Interactive "in Denmark usually the fathers take the last three or four months of leave. This is because a large proportion of mothers breast feed for as long as they can. It is uncommon for men not to take leave. We pay for four months of leave for men (this is not compulsory). The pay is subsidised by government. In Sweden half of the leave goes to the father – there is no choice. In Sweden you can have as much as 18 months' leave. It is paid at 80% salary for one year (pay stops after a year)."

As Dr Javornik has advised, both cultural change and pay will be important in increasing fathers' involvement in childcare in the future.

In our survey of what childcare arrangements employees with children under 18 currently had in place, the highest result was that family or friends helped looked after their children (24%) followed closely behind by flexible working (23%). Of the 23%, 8% were men and 40% were women. In addition, 19% of women stated that they had changed to a job with more flexible hours to fit with their family. This shows how important flexible working is to being able to combine work with family life. When employees were asked about what childcare arrangements they would make in the future, the top results were tied between flexible working, part-time childcare and family/friends helping out, with flexible working clearly therefore being an essential component to the future of their work.



7% of employee respondents said they had taken shared parental leave following the birth of any current children



17% of employee respondents said they would take shared parental leave following the birth of any future children



24% of employee respondents with children under 18 have family and friends helping with childcare arrangements



23% of employee respondents with children under 18 work flexibly as part of their childcare arrangements

Our recommendations

Here are our practical recommendations, aimed at helping to make flexible working a success for employers:

- 1 Ensure the **culture** is such that people actually feel able (and not frightened) to utilise any flexible working practices which organisations have in place or make requests for flexibility. This would involve getting everyone, particularly management, on-board with the policies and ethos and leading from the top.
- 2 An open dialogue and good **communication** is key to making it work – both for those working flexibly and also their managers. It is important that staff still feel part of the team and are not excluded by virtue of their working arrangements. As well as better day-to-day communication, consider taking proactive steps to monitor effectiveness of flexible working and collate feedback, for example, by conducting a staff satisfaction survey every six months.
- 3 Have the right **technology** and IT security measures in place. Employees need to be able to work efficiently and undertake their normal duties (insofar as possible) to enable it to be a success and so they do not feel isolated or disengaged. More and more employers are routinely using video conferencing for meetings/calls, which is now much easier to use and more accessible.
- 4 **Recruiting** the right talent. If an organisation has significant flexibility where staff are trusted to work more autonomously and get the job done with less oversight, then trust is going to be integral to making it work. Trust in any event is fundamental to the employment relationship, so hiring people you can trust should always be of the utmost importance.
- 5 Implement a flexible working **policy/procedure** which gives examples of the types of arrangements that can be requested and ensures employees understand their rights and how to make a request, as well as what is expected of those working remotely/flexibly. Where an employer has a particular practice applicable to everyone (for example, flexi-time), then this should also be included in the policy. Often, however, one size does not fit all and the degree and type of flexibility available differs depending on the role. Also consider how to publicise to staff any new policy or flexible working entitlement, helping to boost morale.

“Another challenge was ensuring firmwide adoption of the policy across the business. We have successfully achieved this through producing employee and managers guides, to ensure the policy is understood by all. It is now working well across the business.”

Kirstie Loveridge,
AEG – Europe

“Flexible working can be introduced gradually, for limited periods of time (trial basis), for very specific tasks whose outcome is tangible and input measurable. This requires change in both the organisation of work, line management and the supervision.”

Dr Jana Javornik,
Associate Professor of Work and Employment Relations at Leeds Business School

“Tech is also important. You need the right technology for flexible working to work. Modo25 use “Microsoft Teams.” There is no point working from home if you don’t have the right technology in place and it helps people who work from home feel less isolated.”

John Readman, Modo25

“We are embracing new technology, such as Microsoft Teams and Yammer to change how we engage and communicate. In the past, we have been far too reliant on email and let’s face it - when was anything great delivered by email?! It’s the bane of corporate life!” Jordan Barry, Motor Insurers’ Bureau

“Comms is key for flexible working. This is especially true if you are a leader – you must be good at communicating with your team about what’s expected. Ultimately flexible working is built on trust and that is a two-way street.”

Matt Phelan, The Happiness Index

“Flexible working is an “all in game”, it doesn’t work unless everyone believes in it. I see many cases where companies implement it but then check up on their staff every 45 seconds. I would argue that you shouldn’t employ someone if you don’t feel like you can trust them to work from home.”

Matt Phelan, The Happiness Index

“Companies need to employ the right people, who want to do the work. People working from home actually end up working more. No degree/UCAS points are necessary, unlike in the large consultancy firms. It’s about the person - spotting the right attitude rather than the academics and ensuring that you don’t miss out on the good people.” John Readman, Modo25

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“Superb knowledge of the law combined with a real world savvy and robustness, a very good combination when dealing with clients who are often in sensitive and fraught situations.”

Legal 500 2020

“Interviewees praise the team’s ‘professionalism, quality of advice, availability, attitude and ability to deliver’.”

Chambers 2020

“They’re extremely easy to work with; pleasant, efficient and very commercial,” another source notes, adding: “They offer a very impressive mix of experts in a range of disciplines.”

Chambers 2020

“One of the most effective and powerful firms. A team that you want on your side.”

Legal 500 2020

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