

Modern Families Index 2018:

how employers can support the UK's working families

With dual-earning families on the rise in the UK, the topic of family-friendly workplaces is a pressing one. The *Modern Families Index* explores how working families, however configured, are managing the combination of work and family life. Examined through the lens of their employment, the *Index* crucially asks parents what needs to change for them to better manage what can be a complicated balancing act.

What the *Index* tells employers:

- The UK continues to have a long hours culture which disadvantages working parents and damages family life - and parents are voting with their feet in response
- There is a clear and growing parenthood penalty - fathers as well as mothers are making career compromises
- Flexible working on its own is not enough to deliver work life balance for parents

- Family friendly workplace culture is key to unlocking parents' potential

These findings provide valuable insights for employers:

- What employers should focus on to support families at work, and;
- The changes employers need to make to future proof their business and recruit, retain and engage the best talent.

Working Families and Bright Horizons can help you make these changes. For further information, please visit:

workingfamilies.org.uk

and

solutions.brighthouse.co.uk

The *Index* is based on a survey of 2,750 working parents with children under 13. The sample is drawn from across 11 UK regions equally to help achieve a balance of working arrangements, types of employment and income. The *Index* also seeks gender balance in its responses; this year the split between mothers and fathers is 53% and 47% respectively.



UNDERSTAND YOUR ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Of the 40% full time working parents putting in extra hours, a third are working the equivalent of an extra working day each week.

The *Index* identified that only 35% of parents manage to finish work on time every day; the majority stay late, take work home or work in the evenings or at weekends at least some of the time.

Why are parents working extra hours? There are two main reasons, which are intrinsically linked. Firstly, poor job design: the work is either too big and is over spilling into home life, or it is structured in a way that means long hours are needed. Secondly, workplace culture and manager expectations: parents fear that their careers won't progress unless they put in the long hours.

For employers, this poses significant challenges. Burnout is becoming an increasing threat, and parents are identifying

work as the main cause. As work demands escalate, short-term remedies are being deployed to tackle the issue, with parents resorting to taking annual leave (37%) or going off sick (33%).

Increased absenteeism and reduced productivity are just two of the resulting impacts on employers, together with dwindling levels of engagement and wellbeing. To alleviate these problems, employers must design jobs effectively so staff can get the job done in their agreed hours; and change their workplace culture to one in which employees do not feel pressured to work extra time to safeguard their career prospects.

- Understand your workplace culture. Do employees feel pressured to work extra time to safeguard their career prospects? If so, work to change this.
- Evaluate, design and organise work effectively, so staff can get the job done in their agreed hours.
- Make work organisation and job design skills a necessary competence for line managers.

“Tackling workplace culture is vital to future proofing business, unlocking working parents’ potential, tackling the gender pay gap and harnessing the business benefits that family friendly and flexible working brings.”

Sarah Jackson, Working Families

ELIMINATE THE ‘PARENTHOOD PENALTY’

Millennials parents were the most resentful; 46% of millennial fathers felt resentful, the highest proportion of any group of parents.

When parents were asked how they felt about their employer in terms of work-life balance, over a third said they felt resentful, with more fathers than mothers agreeing (37% vs. 32%).

To tackle the trade-off between work and family commitments, parents are taking action. One in five parents have stalled their careers and one in ten have refused a new job or turned down a promotion. This attempt to rebalance is most prevalent in younger parents - a trend that will continually challenge increasing numbers of organisations in the future.

So where does this leave us? Sadly, the answer is a pervasive ‘parenthood penalty’ where work life balance and caring for children make it difficult, or impossible,

for mothers or fathers to fulfil their career aspirations and economic potential. This paints a gloomy picture for employers and employees alike.

The *Index* shows us that parents are seeking opportunities with employers that allow them to combine work and family in a healthy, sustainable way. Employers whose workplaces are supportive and encouraging of work-life balance will find that for parents, they are increasingly an employer of choice.

“Organisations must use all the positive, results-orientated tactics at our disposal, especially when the race for talent is this close.”

Denise Priest, Bright Horizons

- Design, promote and encourage organisational policies on properly paid time off that can be used flexibly to help manage work and family life.
- Make sure information around both statutory parental rights and organisational policies on family-friendly and flexible working is clearly signposted and easily accessible; and make it clear that their use isn't just an option but something that is encouraged.
- Consider benchmarking to see what other organisations are doing.
- Invest in support for line managers to ensure commitments to family-friendly working are aligned across the organisation.
- Invest in practical solutions and employer-sponsored family care, for example nursery care and back-up dependant care.

ADD THE FLEX FACTOR

Almost a third of parents that took part in the *Index* say they are unable to work flexibly due to a range of factors, from structural challenges to cultural expectations.

Flexible working is a familiar phrase in the workplace; today's employees, particularly millennials, expect it. For parents unable to work flexibly the reasons vary but include job type, organisational policy, manager opposition, fears about perceived lack of commitment, and disadvantage in terms of promotion and pay.

Flexibility alone is not enough in itself without support. For those parents who do work flexibly it is the best way of gaining control over their work life (those able to work from various locations had the highest control, while those who work part time or reduced hours experienced lower levels of control); but over a third of parents reported that it didn't improve their work life balance.

Although part time and reduced hours work affords

parents some control, it may restrict their ability to further deviate from the full-time 'norm'.

Organisations should aim to deliver aspirational workplaces and not simply seek to tick the box on flexible working. With the increasing need for employers to operate in an agile and flexible way to meet customers' needs, organisations that don't offer flexible working risk being left behind by more flexible 'employers of choice'.

But flexible working must be accompanied by better job design, effective organisation and management, and most importantly by a culture that truly supports balanced working lives – otherwise it is simply the flexibility to manage too much.

- Invest effort in exploring how flexibility is working in your organisation that goes beyond policy accumulation and measuring levels of use, to properly examining its effect and effectiveness.
- Whilst employee's needs for flexibility will vary, flexible working is too often arranged on an ad hoc, individual basis - which can lead to certain groups e.g. mothers, working flexibly. Make flexible working available to all employees. Advertise all jobs as flexible and move towards a position where it's the default to justify why jobs cannot be done flexibly - as opposed to the other way around.
- Use Working Families' *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* strapline and logo to recruit for more human-sized, as well as flexible, jobs.

"Simply making jobs flexible very often means parents are able to 'keep going'; it's only when flexibility is combined with better job design and work organisation that improvements in parents' quality of life will begin to be seen."

Sarah Jackson, Working Families



UNLOCK POTENTIAL

Working parents understand the barrier to better work life balance their workplace culture creates. When asked what employers should do to ensure a good work life balance, the most popular option was ‘change the organisational culture’.

Understanding the challenges facing families in the workplace is a vital first step in finding the right solutions and creating genuinely family-friendly workplaces.

“The Index is a call to employers to move on from policy creation and step up to the next challenge: creating proactive, engaging solutions that make a difference to parents’ lived experience. This is how we will distinguish ourselves from the pack.”

Denise Priest, Bright Horizons

| | Short-Term | Medium-Term | Long-Term |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Creating a great corporate culture | Explore why parents in the workplace might feel work life balance is incompatible with organisational values to drive cultural change. | Review the way work is designed and organised in your organisation. Make work organisation and job design skills a necessary competence for line managers. | Change your workplace culture to one in which employees do not feel pressured to work extra time to safeguard their career prospects. |
| Eliminating the ‘parenthood’ penalty | Make sure information around statutory paternal rights and organisational policies in family-friendly working is clearly signposted and easily accessible. | Design, promote and encourage organisational policies on properly paid time off that can be used flexibly to help manage work and family life. Consider benchmarking to see what others are doing. | Invest in support for line managers to ensure commitments to family-friendly working are aligned across the organisation. Invest in practical solutions and employer-sponsored family care. |
| Adding the flexibility factor | Invest effort in exploring how flexibility is working in your organisation that goes beyond policy accumulation and measuring levels of use, to properly examining its effect and effectiveness. | Use Working Families’ <i>Happy to Talk Flexible Working</i> strapline and logo to recruit for more human-sized, as well as flexible, jobs. | Make flexible working a reality by advertising all jobs as flexible and move towards a position where it’s the default to justify why jobs cannot be done flexibly. |

Bright Horizons Family Solutions works with employers to provide employer-sponsored family care, offering invaluable, practical support for working families with caring responsibilities. From nursery care to back-up care for children and adults, there are many options available to complement the needs of your workforce.

Visit: solutions.brighthorizons.co.uk or email europaclientservices@brighthorizons.com to find out more and speak to an expert.

Working Families works with employers to create family friendly workplaces.

For more information about membership options and/or the training and consultancy support offered to employers (including training for line managers), and for more information about job design and the *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* strapline and logo, please contact the Employer Services Team on **020 7153 1230** or email employers@workingfamilies.org.uk

www.workingfamilies.org.uk