

Flexible First Toolkit

How to be a #FlexibleFirst Organisation
November 2020

WACL

FOREWORD

Welcome to WACL's Flexible First Toolkit.

For those of you who don't know us, WACL are a group of around 250 of the UK's most senior women from the fields of advertising and communications, marketing and media.

Our mission is to accelerate gender equality. Alongside supporting the senior women leaders who make up our membership and fundraising for industry charities, WACL also:

- Inspires working women aspiring to leadership roles with our talent mentoring programme and events.
- Campaigns in areas that have the greatest impact on gender equality. For example, closing the Gender Pay Gap, addressing the representation of women in the media, and #timeTo, a campaign to end sexual harassment at work.

In 2020/21, WACL is campaigning for flexible working practices to be adopted as an industry standard. We unpack the answers to 'why' and 'how' in more detail

throughout this Toolkit, but the headlines are:

- Flexible working isn't a one-sided benefit. It can benefit the business as well as the employee, which is why the Taylor review refer to it as 'two-way flexibility'.
- As industry leaders, our goal is to affect change. In terms of reducing the Gender Pay Gap, we know one of the single biggest levers available to organisations is a wholesale commitment to offering two-way flexible working practices alongside time spent in the office.
- When everyone's remuneration is based upon output and not time spent in the office, more women are attracted to senior positions and they must be paid the same, directly helping to close the Gender Pay Gap and accelerating gender equality in the process.

If we didn't know it before, the context of a global pandemic has

shown us once and for all that when offered as a genuine choice alongside time spent in the office, flexible working is in fact better for everyone:

- Better for **men** and **women**
- Better for **business** and **society**
- Better for **employers** and **employees** alike

A decade of UK historical data (which has been amplified by lockdown experiences) and our own WACL leaders' case studies support a robust business case for flexible working:

- Unlocking Productivity, Performance and Potential
- Improving Recruitment, Retention and Resilience

And if that weren't enough, CMI and Timewise survey data tells us that this is simply what the vast majority of people in work now want and expect. There's not only a long-term business case, but post-lockdown we're seeing

positive shifts in perception and a much greater acceptance of flexible working. And with the looming reality of a she-depression, not just a **she-cession**, the time to act is now. By ensuring there is an industry standard in place for flexible working, WACL intends to guide and encourage organisations to commit to making this shift. We're arming businesses with the knowledge that flexible working can be business-performance-enhancing, helps close the Gender Pay Gap and is 'culture-add', with benefits for everyone.

This Toolkit gives leaders and talent the information and strategies they need to implement two-way flexible working in their organisations.

We look at the business case, what flexible working means, some of the possible drawbacks and how to avoid the pitfalls, and how to get started.

With our summary of the latest research and stats, interviews with industry leaders and case studies of companies in the vanguard of flexible working, we hope to leave you inspired, informed and motivated with the tools to drive a Flexible First organisation.

In the spirit of deeds not words, join us in turning the page on the old ways of working. It's time to set aside old biases about where and when employees work, and time to advocate for the long-term flexible working environments we know are win-win for employees and companies alike.

Yours,

Jackie Stevenson, Catherine Becker,
Mel Exon, Deborah Parkes, Amanda Farmer,
Su-Mei Thompson, Jenny Varley



**Flexible
working has
benefits for
everyone, not
just women.**

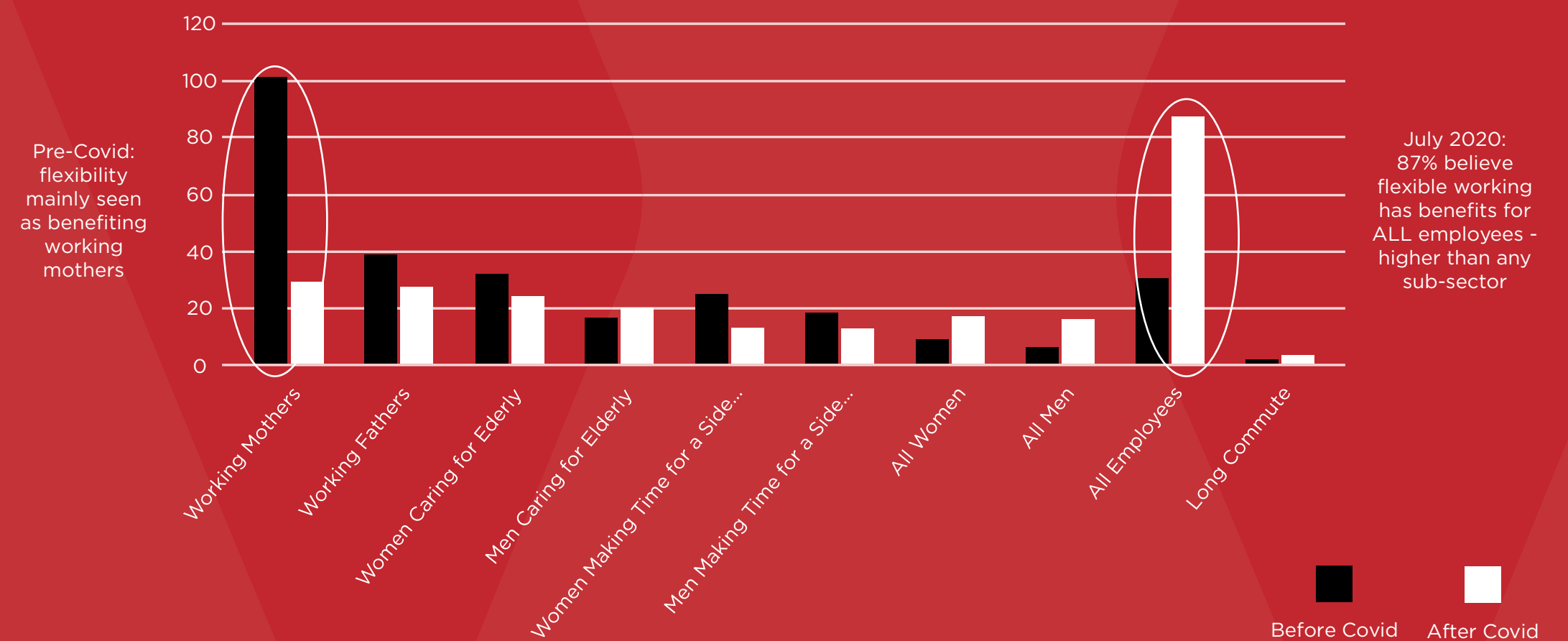
THE BUSINESS CASE

Offering flexible working in all its forms allows more women into the workforce in the first place and creates the conditions for them to stay in work for longer. There's the opportunity to progress and earn more money by taking on more senior roles, ultimately to leadership and board level positions where the gap has always been at its worst.

But the benefits offered by flexible working aren't just restricted to women. When companies offer a genuine, two-way choice of working time and place, studies have proven the far-reaching effects for both men and women; business and society; unlocking productivity, performance and potential; and improving recruitment, retention and resilience.

When everyone's remuneration is based upon output, not time spent in the office, we'll see more women attracted to senior positions, and they must be paid accordingly, helping to close the Gender Pay Gap and accelerate gender equality in the process.

A shift in perception to 'has benefits for all employees'



**“IT’S NOT BINARY
IT’S A BLEND.”**



What does flexible working mean?

Flexible working is more than WFH. The definition for flexible working is “working arrangements which allow employees to vary the amount, timing or location of their work”.^[1] Flexible working encompasses:

Part-time

Working less than normal full-time hours.

Flexi-time

Working an agreed total number of hours or days each week, or having adjusted start, finish or break times.

Compressed hours

Working the total number of contracted weekly hours in fewer than the typical number of working days each week. This means working days are longer than normal.

Home or Remote working

Working all or part of contracted hours from home or offsite.

Annualised hours

Averaging out working time across the year to work a set number of hours per annum rather than per week. These are often split into core hours that are worked each week and unallocated hours that can be used for peaks in demand. Working patterns can vary from week to week or month to month.

Term-time working

Follows school term patterns. Working as normal during term-time and taking leave during school holidays, while remaining an employee.

Structured time off in lieu

Working longer hours during busy periods and taking an equivalent amount of time off (with pay) when it’s quieter. There may be limits to the number of hours that can be built up and when time can be taken off.

Job-sharing

Working part-time (either part-day, part-week or part-year) and sharing the duties and responsibilities of a full-time position with a colleague.

Varied-hours working or time banking

Working for short periods of time to manage specific pieces of work, such as covering a social media feed. For example between 6pm and 9pm on a Tuesday evening.

^[1] UK Government: Department for BIS (2011) Consultation on Modern Workplaces, p31



As we build a library of best-in-class examples of organisations embracing flexible working, it is clear that they all had their own motivations and are reaping the rewards. Here we explore what those are.

Productivity

9 in 10 employees consider flexible working to be a key motivator to their productivity (89% – even more than financial incentives (77%).^[2]

83% of those who have access to remote working believe it increases their productivity.^[2]

30% of UK office workers are more productive.^[3]

“We’re working from home, not home workers right now... Building a Flexible First approach is a 3 stage process: Get ready, Roll out, Sustain.”

Katrina Lowes
Head of Marketing,
Vodafone Global Enterprise

Performance

61% of employers said their profitability increased.^[4]

Flexible work schedules help employees balance their work and life responsibilities and boost performance,^[5] increasing average labour productivity for large and small businesses.^[6]

Sickness absence is reduced – for example, a recent UNISON survey showed that sickness reduced from 12% to 2% amongst those that worked flexibly.^[7]

57% expect profits to increase over next 5 years (compared to 45% of all businesses).^[8]

91% of managers agreed working for an organisation that offers blended working motivates them to do their role well.^[9]

Potential

Gender diverse leadership teams deliver an 18% return on equity premium.^[10]

McKinsey calculate that improving diversity could add £150 billion a year to the UK economy by 2025.^[10]

Women who are able to work flexibly are half as likely as those who do not to reduce their hours after childbirth.^[11]

99% of all businesses surveyed believe that a flexible workforce is vital or important to competitiveness, the prospects for business investment and job creation.^[12]

^[2] HSBC Commercial Banking (Nov. 2017) Flexible Working Report | ^[3] YouGov Report (2015) | ^[4] Vodafone Business (2016) Vodafone Workplace Survey - Flexible: friend or foe? | ^[5] White et al (2003) 'High performance' Management Practices, Working Hours and Work-Life Balance <https://www.managers.org.uk/cmi-women/blueprint-for-balance>; Berg et al., (2004); MacDermid & Tang, (2009) | ^[6] Golden (2011) The effects of working time on productivity and firm performance: a research synthesis paper | ^[7] Working Families (Sep. 2014) Unison Report - Flexible working: Making it work | ^[8] CMI (Aug. 2020) Managers Voice Pulse Point - Gender Parity | ^[9] CMI (July 2020) Blended working Roundtable | ^[10] Credit Suisse and McKinsey research, cited in CMI (2017) Leadership for change, p.10:Workplaces, p3 | ^[11] Chung, H. & van der Horst, M. (University of Kent) (Jan. 2018) 'Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking' | ^[12] CBI & Pertemps (2017), Employment Trends Survey

The Benefits of Flexible Working

Resilience

Having a workforce that's already flexible first and equipped to work in or out of office, means you've got an adaptable and scalable business for the future.

Companies like Vodafone powered through the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic thanks to their flexible culture – “Flexible working has improved our operational resilience as a company. During lockdown, we have been able to operate in a “business as usual” way, because remote working and flexible hours are fundamentally embedded and understood within our culture” ^[13]

Flexible working allows companies to adapt to fluctuating market demand to boost responsiveness and competitiveness. The CBI Employment Trends survey found that 99% of all businesses surveyed believes that a flexible workforce is vital or important to competitiveness and the prospects for business investment and job creation.

Retention

Higher levels of engagement, experienced by working flexibly, can reduce staff turnover by 87%. ^[14]

Flexible working improves employee satisfaction and loyalty, reducing churn. ^[15]

59% would feel happier at work. 52% would be more likely to stay with their employer. ^[15]

92% of young people want to work flexibly. ^[16]

Recruitment

In 2020 most of us have already got a taste of some of the benefits of flexible working, but the hunger has been there longer.

As of 2018 87% of both men and women want to work flexibly but only 11% of jobs are being advertised as flexible. ^[17]

So if you want wider access to diverse talent, you could be cutting yourself short if you're not offering flexibility.

And now that employees and employers have experienced the joy of flexible working, these stats could swiftly change. In fact, they already have.

“Employers need to think about how they can use this to facilitate the changes people want to make in their lives rather than go back to a world where we are suppressing them.”

Alex Mahon

CEO, Channel 4

^[13] Vodafone case study for WACL “How to be a #FlexibleFirst Organisation’ seminar, October 2020 | ^[14] Institute for Employment Studies & The Work Foundation (2018) People and the bottom line | ^[15] Working Families & Bright Horizons (2020) Modern families index 2020 | ^[16] UKCES (2014) Annual Report | ^[17] Timewise Flexible Jobs Index (2018)



WHAT WORKS FOR WOMANKIND WORKS FOR MANKIND

What business today doesn't want to boast gender equality? The thing is, we're not all there yet.

There's lots to be said about the gender pay gap and why it still exists, but here are just a few insights that suggest flexible working for all could help close it.

Women only make up about 25% of management positions, despite making up 50% of the world's higher education graduates.^[18]

The presence of women tends to drop off around mid-management level, which is one of the biggest areas contributing to the gender pay gap.

Around this stage, women still take up majority primary carer role in their families. This was even evident during lockdown where working women still bore the brunt of most childcare and household duties while balancing work responsibilities.^[19]

More often than not, women are less able to conform to the traditional 9–5 full time role. Which is why we see a pattern of women in low paid, part time work even if they're overqualified.

Women who return to work after having a child earn around a third less than male counterparts, taking between a 12% and 32%** pay cut, so salaries rise, female presence falls.^[20]

The lack of female presence in senior roles not only makes it the norm for men to be seen as decision makers, it makes it harder for more women to aspire to leadership roles.

A recent study by Wwomen of Influence* found that although only 32% of female respondents believed that reaching the C-suite was an achievable goal, this increased to 49% if they had a mentor, and 61% with a sponsor.^[21]

83% of women with access to flexible working arrangements aspire to the C-suite, versus 54% of those without.^[18]

Just these statistics and observations alone highlight some of the barriers women face in the progression of their careers, but these barriers can easily be removed in the world of business today.

For women to have any chance of becoming equal and for us to close the gender pay gap, flexible working needs to become the standard for all. So that women, like their male counterparts can progress and earn a higher salary, even if they choose to have a family.

After all, if more mothers and fathers are able to be flexible, who is to say that women will feel they are the ones obligated to choose part-time work? And why can't more fathers feel confident to ask for more time with their children?

^[18] McKinsey & Company (2017) 'Women matter: Time to accelerate – 10 years of insights into gender diversity' | ^[19] <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jul/22/women-took-on-bulk-of-childcare-during-british-lockdown-study-finds> | ^[20] https://www.womensequality.org.uk/flexible_working_gender_pay_gap

^[21] Grant Thornton (March 2019) Women in business: Building a blueprint for action

Drawbacks, objections and solutions

What's stopping us going flexible first?

It's clear that there's a largely warranted desire for flexible working, but why haven't we seen more businesses and employers sign up, prior to the fast-track that was COVID-19? What have the main barriers, drawbacks or concerns been?

Teamwork

According to the 'Blueprint for Balance' report 43% of respondents said the main drawback of flexible working is that it makes it harder to collaborate effectively. ^[22]

The 'CIPD Cross Sector Insights on Enabling Flexible Working Guide' takes a look at the potential barriers for collaboration and teams, and suggests that lack of colleague interaction can lead to feelings of isolation. And 'the challenge is for flexible workers to still spend time building relationships and networking with colleagues.' ^[23]

What can be done?

While a bit more organisation is required, it doesn't mean the traditional full-time team should be picking up any slack. Job sharing now has a whole

infrastructure around it, including job sharing sites. If your team are firm, confident and organised you can prove that physically being in an office nearly every hour of every day isn't the way to deliver excellence in output.

Management

There can be a perception that flexible workers are more difficult to manage. One third of managers surveyed found this to be the case. ^[22] In addition, managers have to stay on top of various schedules, and ensure there are enough team members on the job. ^[22]

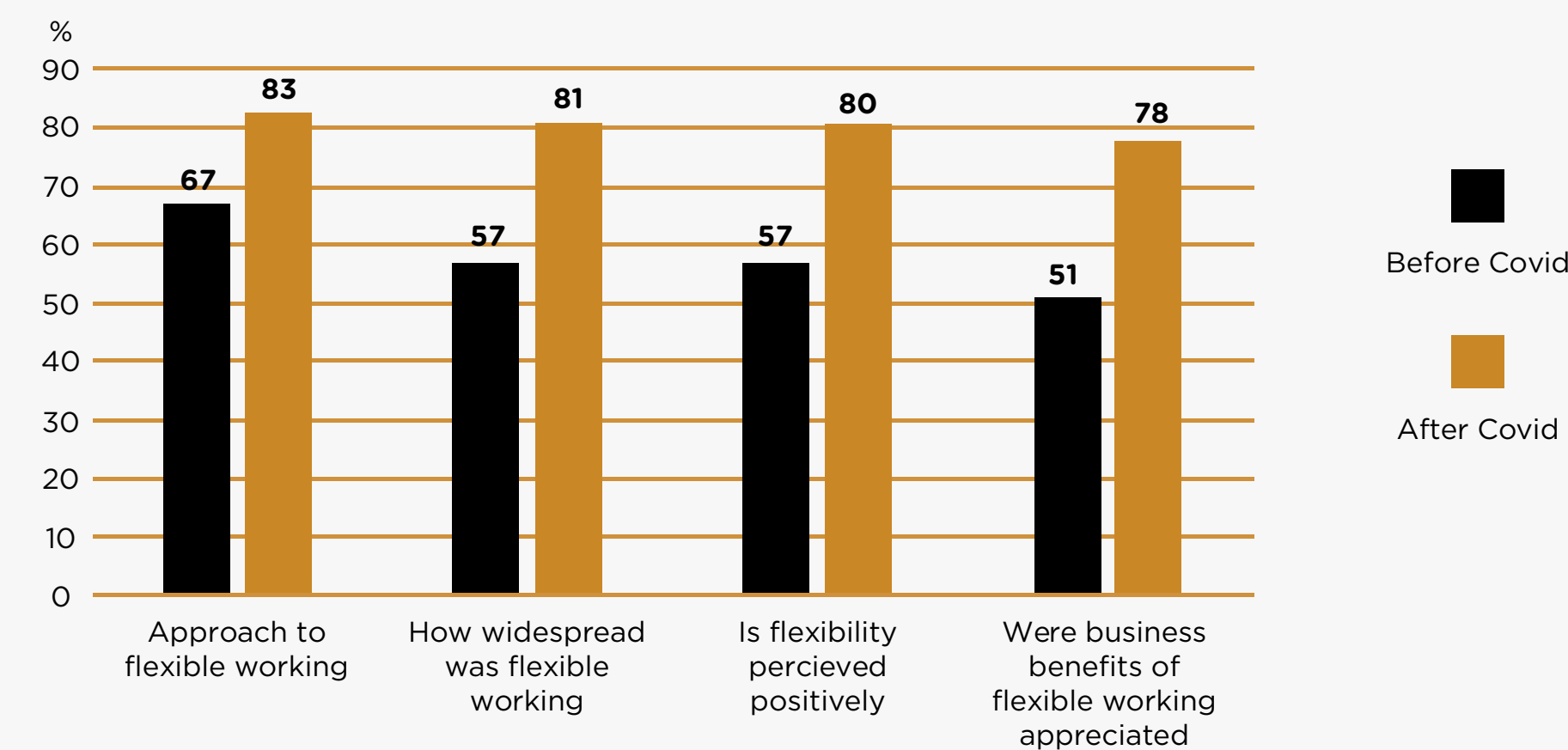
What can be done?

This shouldn't be a problem for individuals to solve. If your direct boss objects to flexible working, go to the top. This is a company-wide benefit and #FlexibleFirst companies acknowledge that the small sacrifice for the individual is more than made up for by the advantages it brings to the whole company.

Work-life balance

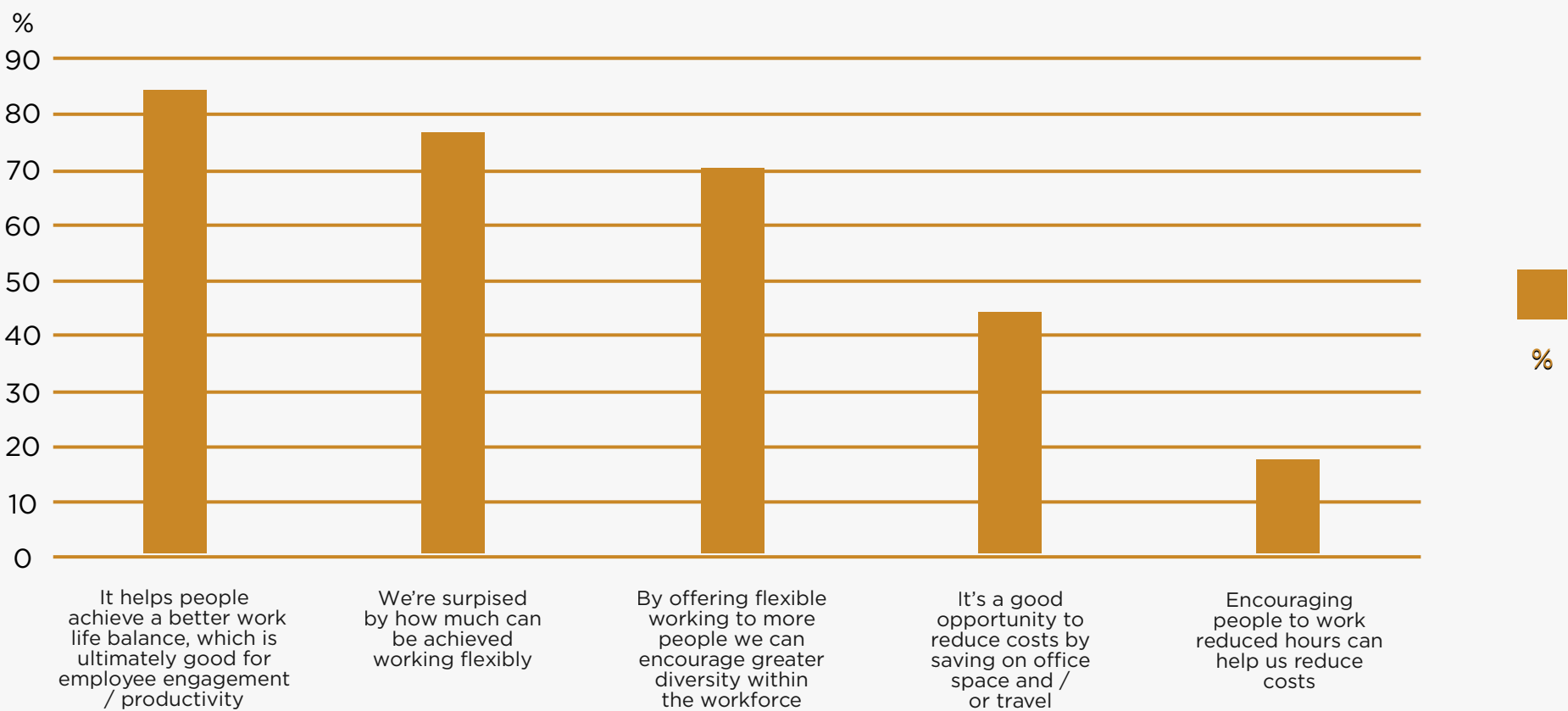
While we often think of flexible working as a step towards a good work-life balance, it can also be the opposite and lead to overworking. Dr Heejung Chung, University of Kent says there are three key reasons for this. Firstly, employees feel a pressure to work harder to thank their employer for this 'gift of flexibility', and to overcompensate as a reaction to negative stigmas surrounding flexible working. Secondly, employers can end up casually increasing workloads where

Attitudes to flexible working are improving



^[22] MCMI (Jan. 2018) A Blueprint for Balance, page 21 | ^[23] CIPD (June 2019) Cross-Sector Insights on Enabling Flexible Working, page 19

Why? A positive impact on work-life balance, diversity and productivity



What can be done?

We need to make it known that flexibility benefits all – it's not just for women, mothers, or carers – and we have many case studies to back this up. Many of our allies are men, some of whom are fathers while others are people with other interests or businesses. These people can attest to the fact that flexible working is good for everyone, so now we just need to get the rest on board.

Stigma

As touched on in some of the above sections, a lot of the barriers we face when it comes to shifting to a more flexible workforce, are rooted in our perceptions. One in three people identify a 'flexibility stigma' [25] whereby flexible workers are seen as less productive and assumed to contribute less.

The 'Gender, Flexibility Stigma and the Perceived Negative Consequences of Flexible Working in the UK' [26] study found that 35% of all workers believed flexible workers generate more work for others, and 32% believe flexible workers have lower chances for promotion.

The study also found that men were more likely to say they

experienced negative outcomes due to co-workers working flexibly, while mothers were more likely to say they experienced negative career consequences due to their own flexible working.

Echoing the same observation, the Blueprint For Balance report found the flexibility stigma was a particular concern for women, with 37% of female managers feeling that promotion prospects may be affected by choosing to work flexibly, compared to a quarter of men.

The negative perceptions surrounding flexible working can also lead to team frictions. The CIPD Flexible Working Guide [27] notes there is a perception that flexible working is only for certain types of employees which can lead to resentment between flexible workers and non-flexible workers.

What can be done?

The flexibility stigma needs to be retired once and for all. Flexibility keeps senior women in the workplace longer, keeps them more motivated and delivers all the benefits of their experience. If we keep reinforcing these points and sharing the Case Studies of the women and companies leading the way on this, we're

confident that this will effect improvement and change.

Let's focus on output instead of presenteeism. The need to be seen in the office is a myth that has been turned on its head. It's been made clear that we can function at high productivity, even if not face-to-face. It's crucial that we continually remind employers of this point. We also need to stand our ground collectively around our worth. If we excel to deliver the same output in less hours means we should not take a pay cut?

there are less boundaries or regulation around hours worked. This is especially true when employees 'volunteer' more hours in their days to meet demands. Thirdly, advanced technology and working flexibly can create a high-pressure, always-on culture.

According to the Modern Family index, the 'potential wellbeing benefits' that could come with flexible working are being 'undermined' by workplaces who continue to push the always-on culture.

"Parents who tend to work extra hours were more than twice as likely to think about work issues whilst they are with their family regularly or all the time (41%) compared to 20% of parents working within their contracted hours." [24]

"72% of parents staying in 'work mode' said they feel stressed, compared to one in five parents better able to 'switch off'." [24]

"Three in five parents who work extra hours said they have to because it is the only way to deal with their workload."[24]

A group of people are seated at a long wooden table in a modern office environment. They are viewed from behind, looking towards a large screen that displays a video conference with several participants. The office has large windows and a contemporary design.

THINGS MUST CHANGE

While some of these drawbacks and barriers have been observed in performance or output, many of them are based on passé perceptions, tired traditions and outdated office models. By focusing on employers and managers embracing and implementing flexible working more universally, we could finally eradicate the stigma and diminish most of the barriers to flexible working we've seen to-date. Isn't it time we focus more on productivity than presentism?



Broadcast the benefits^[28]

To get everyone on the same page, you'll want to start sharing the potential benefits within your organisation, from the ground up. Hopefully some of the stats in this pack will help you to start doing so. The benefits you expect as an organisation can then be used to measure the success of flexible working at a later stage.

Tailor your pitch

On top of the general benefits, you might want to anchor your argument to a particular business need that you think flexible working could address within the organisation. That could be recruitment, retention, the gender pay gap or other current concerns.

Communication is key

To get people on board you need to communicate both formally and informally. Think through emails, videos and campaigns as well as casually over a cuppa in the kitchen. You'll want to be armed with some myth-busters and success stories. It's not all on you though, build a team of flexible first champions to help build community and momentum.

Consider and support^[29]

Try to cultivate a supportive culture, with support from leaders, as well as HR support. Of course you'll still need to consider the facilitators and barriers such as: integration of flexible working with other strategies and policies, planning and trialling flexible working, technology, job role suitability and job design, dealing with the volume of applications, and costs.

Start at the top^[30]

Get the go-ahead from those with the power to influence change around flexible working and encourage take-up (think senior leaders and line managers). Communicate benefits and share success stories. Provide line managers with support and guidance to help them feel confident dealing with flexible working requests and managing flexible workers.

Get creative^[31]

To implement flexible working you might need to try some new approaches. The case studies in our toolkit offer up some examples of how other businesses made creative and innovative changes.

While some roles may seem to lend themselves better to working flexibly, it's still possible to consider some form of flexible working in almost all roles – even if traditionally seen as being difficult for flexible working, including senior or customer-facing roles, and in sectors like manufacturing.

Recruit flexible first^[32]

As we've learnt, more and more people are looking for flexible roles, meaning you're more likely to have the pick of a diverse pool of talent if you're flexible first. We're advocating all roles in your company are advertised as "flexible roles". This indicates you're a progressive company people will want to work for and encourage rather than discourage a wider pool of talented candidates. It will work best if you've already considered how any new roles can be flexible from the start and made sure the job requirements work with the flexible working pattern. You'll need to consider hours, whether this can be full-time or part-time, where work needs to be carried out and consider the role's dependencies.

"I believe the adoption of flexible working at scale is most difficult for middle managers. It's fine for leaders to advocate it but it is line managers who are having to make it work on the ground."

Carolyn McCall DBE
CEO, ITV



WE ARE A WACL 2020/21
Flexible First
LEADERSHIP ORGANISATION

**Ready
to work
flexibly?**

Keep in touch^[33]

Out of sight shouldn't mean out of mind, remember to be inclusive of all flexible workers. Some management tips to consider:

- Make sure they have fair access to career conversations
- Review whether flexible working is working for the individual as well as the team
- Have regular informal conversations as well as appraisals and reviews
- Encourage and record training sessions for flexible workers to make use of later
- Make sure they have the right equipment for their particular flexible arrangement

Consider the pros and cons

For flexible working to work, everyone needs to do their bit. From individuals, to teams, to managers. To do this, it helps to get everyone to consider the facilitators and barriers they can present towards flexible working as well as those from the rest of the organisation. HR professionals can provide support and advice to get people thinking about flexible working on a case-by-case basis. Managers may need additional time and technical resources to help them manage flexible working in their team.

Learn as you go^[33]

Implement measurement and evaluation from the start. For example, take baseline measures before flexible working is in place and follow-up measures at appropriate intervals later on. You may even want to ease in by trial or piloting flexible working. This not only helps evaluate the impact of flexible working, but you can take the learnings and use them to refine your flexible working approach for the future.

Raring to go?

To support organisations looking to implement two-way flexible working at scale, we've developed a #FlexibleFirst **checklist** to help you assess your progress.

Any organisation committed to the assessment criteria can download a #FlexibleFirst mark (standard or leadership level) for use in company email signatures and communications.

“We have fallen forward by about 10 years in terms of psychological and technical barriers, and it's now up to us to embed all of our learnings into a new frontier for genuine flexibility in our working lives.”

Helen Matthews

Chief People Officer,
Ogilvy UK

^[33] Katie Womersley & Juan Pablo Buritica (March 2019) The Holloway Guide to Remote Work, p 31-38 Practices of Successful Teams

INTERVIEW WITH CILLA SNOWBALL

In this piece for Campaign from September 2020, Dame Cilla Snowball, former group chairman and chief executive of AMV BBDO, says embedding flexible working is complex but should offer organisations long-term benefits.

Serving on the boards of both the Wellcome Trust and Derwent London, I've certainly done plenty of thinking about the health and property implications of reimagining the office.

Covid is reshaping the way we think about everything, accelerating change amidst profound uncertainty. The disorder will be with us for some while yet — and change will be lasting

Faced with a deadly, highly infectious, frequently asymptomatic disease, our only option is working out how to live with it for the upcoming weeks, months or years.

So reimagining the office is a defining imperative. How we navigate this speaks to the very heart of company values and culture. These are life-and-death decisions. We'd better get them right.

Six months in crisis management has changed the way we think about work and the office. It's taught us how to operate flexibly, to entrust responsibility for when and where we work to employees and to accelerate the digitisation of how we organise, source, sell and distribute.

[continued >](#)



All good, but with the global economic damage running into trillions, Britain entering the deepest recession in its history, growth stalled, unemployment rising and trust in institutions plummeting, it is little wonder that the UK is resuming office life far more tentatively than our colleagues in Europe.

We know we have to reboot businesses and get growth moving again, not just in our own industry, but also in those we depend on to function. We feel the collective responsibility to protect jobs and livelihoods. However, feeling our way back into something that's forever changed takes a courage and conviction that's hard to muster when trust is low and fear is high.

No one-size-fits-all solution.

The only way out of the pandemic crisis is working together, and not just on vaccines and treatments. Most non-trivial problems require collective solutions.

And collective solutions are exactly what's needed at a time when we have to prepare safe and sustainable plans for returning to work and resuming regular operations. There isn't a silver bullet or

a one-size-fits-all solution here. Every organisation is different and, within them, every employee has different circumstances.

Reopening offices is far more complex than locking them down.

But there's a huge opportunity here to build back better, to coin a phrase, and to use this moment to create a new and better office and remote-working experience for everyone.

And it has to be both, because most of us will end up doing a mixture of both in future – working on-site and off-site in a blend.

While we coped in lockdown, I'm not sure that many of us could sustain it for much longer mentally, physically or economically.

I'm lucky to work in two organisations where everyone rose to the occasion and handled everything magnificently, but I know we all miss being together in person. And that's not soppy sentimentalism. Business is about relationships and there is no substitute for building relationships with colleagues and clients in person. This pays the bills.

Offices build momentum, set the pace and standard, bring people together, build culture, attract talent, promote the collaboration that sparks creativity, problem-solving and celebration. Doing all that on Zoom calls is possible, but it's slow and unrewarding.

Going back to the office is a massive step. And that's why the business of getting people back has to be more of an invitation than an instruction – encouragement at an individual level, not a blanket mandate. This is a choice and it's a big hurdle.

So we need to be deeply granular, supportive and compassionate when giving people the tools and information to encourage them back.

In many organisations health and wellness always was a motivating principle, but it has to be the indisputable driving factor on everything now, informed not just by policy, but also by regular input from staff surveys on changing attitudes and concerns.

You need to do a lot of listening in an ever-evolving crisis environment.

A flexible workforce plan is now the sustainable norm. Some will choose to continue to work remotely. A proportion of staff will have to, in most offices, if densities don't allow for safe physical distancing. For most organisations it's about making the office available and desirable to those who can and want to come in, even occasionally. Most people will be doing off-site as well as on-site work.

And, of course, at the office it's about creating higher-quality, adaptable space with improved air quality and ventilation, heightened health and safety, more space between desks and in communal areas, one-way systems, lift protocols, enhanced cleaning and hygiene.

It's about tracking regularly and sensitively on what staff need and want, how their safety and wellbeing can best be supported, the equitable distribution of work, avoidance of burnout, asking the "How are you?" question widely and frequently and listening hard to the answer.

It's about having a flexible workforce plan that is no longer a one-off crisis response, but the sustainable norm.

It's also about an embedded diversity strategy that recognises and responds to the emerging evidence that Covid-19 is having a disproportionate effect on people from BAME backgrounds.

Some companies are going even further on health and safety. Some large companies are installing doctors as their own in-house chief medical officers.

Some are organising their own twice-weekly Covid testing for staff, others are antibody-testing all staff before their return to the office.

Many are making greater provision for cyclists, car shares, staggered shift times and alternate workdays. All these initiatives (and this isn't an exhaustive list) will help to build trust, eliminate fear and provide the seeds of encouragement to get back into the office.

Once back, even for a day or so, we're reminded of the benefits of being back and the main hurdle is overcome. I said this is a collective effort and, however robust and resilient our individual offices and office plans, we can't succeed without strong support from government.

A genuinely robust testing programme, schools reopened safely, safe and affordable public transport, clear comms and decent childcare support are the absolute basics we need to navigate this next stage.

In an evolving global health emergency, we all have lots to do and tonnes still to learn. So reimagining the office will be a process of evolution and revolution for all of us.

The stakes couldn't be higher, nor the spoils greater for those who get this next bit right. Good luck to everyone.

Dame Cilla Snowball is a non-executive director of Derwent London, a governor of Wellcome Trust and a former group chairman and chief executive of AMV BBDO.

CASE STUDIES

The various forms of flexible working at scale are relatively new to many organisations. However, there's lots to be learned from companies in the vanguard of flexible working.

To help inspire, inform and motivate you in your journey towards becoming a Flexible First organisation, we've got a selection of case studies from those organisations with the most experience.

We'll continue to publish best-in-class case studies in order to help organisations avoid the pitfalls and reap the benefits of a Flexible First workforce as quickly and as smoothly as possible. You can view these case studies **here**, and follow our #FlexibleFirst campaign on **Twitter** and **LinkedIn**.



“Flexible working is about so much more than a binary choice between home or office. You really need to think about meeting the needs of different people in the workplace.

It is about trusting that your employees come to work to do the best job they can do. But where that work is entirely down to them. One of the things I encourage is for clients and agencies to really talk about how they manage their teams collectively and to not have one rule for one and one for another.”

Katrina Lowe

Head of Marketing,
Vodafone Global Enterprise



“A results-only work environment is the way to go, where we look at outputs not hours. Research shows that eight hours in the office leads to 2 hours and 43 minutes of actual work. Being fully remote is tough on people, but there is not eight hours of work going on in an office either.

Ultimately if people are happy, they will be more productive.”

Justine Roberts OBE

CEO & Founder of
Mumsnet and Gransnet



“If you really want to have a diverse and inclusive company you have to adapt for people’s needs. Unilever has promoted and advocated for flexible working for over a decade; with a relentless focus on giving all employees more control over their lives.

It is an approach which has led to employees feeling much happier and more engaged, which in turn drives productivity. We know that when people feel more engaged with a company their performance increases by 25%.”

Aline Santos

Global EVP of Marketing
and Chief Diversity & Inclusion
Officer at Unilever



“In order to evolve, transform and grow as a business, employees should feel invested in, trusted to do their jobs and given the opportunity to be creative and innovative wherever and whenever it suits them best. Get it right and flexible working can be a powerful tool to support employee happiness, productivity, retention and diversity – all vital for a people-business like ours.”

Sue Frogley

CEO of Publicis Media



“We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset and build a truly flexible future of work that works for everyone. At Miroma Group, the conversatios on this topic are dynamic rather than “one size fits all”. Each of the Group’s agencies is discovering what works best for them and the idea of building a future of work that works for everyone is an iterative process. But the group is focused on measuring outcomes not inputs. We want to ensure that the flexibility we currently provide and the ways of working we will adopt going forward, will create environments that enable our people more productive and more open to fresh, creative possibilities.”

Mark Nohr

Chairman of Fold 7 and Group
Chief Executive of Miroma Agencies



“Even if people doubted previously that remote working could be effective, I think that the lockdown has changed that. It’s been a big shift in Society - a different way of living and working for so many.”

Carolyn McCall DBE

CEO of ITV



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WACL

WACL is an industry networking organisation that brings together the most senior female leaders in marketing and communications. Our members are drawn from brands, media owners, advertising and media agencies, and other industry businesses, and our purpose is to accelerate gender equality in communications and marketing. To deliver this we focus on three things:

- Inspiration
- Support
- Campaigning

We provide inspiration to aspiring female talent via Gather, our annual conference, and our quarterly mentoring sessions, and offer training bursaries via our Future Leaders Award to aid women in achieving their potential.

We also come together to inspire and help each other and regularly hold prestigious speaker dinner events and activities for the enjoyment of our members and their guests, and in support of our purpose.

Our 2020/21 campaigning focus is on flexible working, leading with our call for organisations to commit to being #FlexibleFirst. Flexible working is a primary influencing factor in closing the gender pay gap, ultimately delivering gender equality in our industry and beyond.

We also raise money for NABS, the charity that champions the well-being of our industry's people.

Find out more at <https://wac1.info>

WACL Flexible First Campaigning Committee Support

With grateful thanks to the following for generously giving their talent, skill and time to this campaign: Aline Santos, Justine Roberts, Katrina Lowe, Sue Frogley, Carolyn McCall, Mark Nohr, Jackie Stevenson and Nadine Young.

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WACL Flexible First Campaigning Committee

Catherine Becker
Mel Exon
Deborah Parkes
Amanda Farmer
Su-Mei Thompson
Jenny Varley





Appendix

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