Getting the Balance Right

A STUDY INTO THE IMPACT OF MATERNITY LEAVE ON THE COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

GROWTH
Focus
FLEXIBILITY
engagement
RESULTS
Nurture
responsibility
“The Communications Industry is losing excellent talent before it needs to due to burn out and lack of work life balance. As leaders we have to model an appropriate work life balance and increase our flexibility if we are to retain top talent.”

A STUDY PARTICIPANT

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Introduction

Welcome to the Gender Balance Survey Report, ‘Getting the Balance Right’, a study which concentrates on the issues triggered by maternity leave within the Communications Industry. Initiated by leading search and selection consultancy Hanson Search, in association with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), the survey was designed to provide insights for industry professionals regarding the challenges working mothers face and the issues surrounding maternity leave for their employers. It is imperative for companies to be able to retain experienced talent and is the fundamental reason why we decided to invest in this initiative.

As an industry professional in Communications recruitment, I have been made fully aware of the issues and challenges facing both candidates and employers when it comes to either recruiting or encouraging senior women back into the workplace after maternity leave and reducing exit rates.

Over the last few decades, the business case for diversity and inclusion has become well established. Whilst gender is only one aspect of diversity, it is of particular concern in the Communications Industry: the simple truth is that the number of women in senior positions remains low, widening the gender diversity gap even further, especially as more women are considering leaving the industry as a result of problems caused by maternity leave.

Returning to work after maternity leave can be a daunting experience for many women, leaving behind the ‘family bubble’ and re-entering the professional world. What’s more, proving to themselves and those around them that they are still capable of doing their job to the previous high standards, can be a major challenge.

However, the survey did explore the issue of flexibility on both sides. Many senior employees wish to return to work at the same level or the same degree of status as when they left. The survey questioned what would constitute a fair balance – how flexible is flexible and can employees still add value and deliver against the high standard of work and commitment required at senior management level? The simple answer is that in most cases they can – but a degree of understanding on the part not just of these individuals but their employers and colleagues is needed to ‘square the circle’.

Based on the survey insights, a round table strategy discussion among key stakeholders has resulted in a formulated action plan for best practice. We have designed this to help motivate the flexible working agenda, to the mutual benefit of both employees and employers alike, aimed ultimately at driving business success. We hope you find this report enlightening as well as helpful.

Alice Weightman
Managing Director, Hanson Search
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

13.4% of senior employees think employers are out of touch with working mothers and plan to quit the Communications Industry in the next two years if employers continue to deny flexible provisions for those wishing to return from maternity leave.

A substantial 48.5% are actively considering moving to another company and a further 14.4% are considering giving up work completely due to the issues caused by maternity leave.

Whilst an overall 9.4% of employers have expressed concerns about hiring women of child-bearing age (aged 30 – 40), only 5% of male employers found that factor to be an issue, leaving 14% of senior female bosses with reservations about recruiting women in that crucial age bracket. The proportion of senior female managers with children (one-third vs. two-thirds male) does beg the question about attitudes towards workers and who takes ultimate responsibility for how the senior teams operate.

The majority of employers (80.2%) recognise the need to address flexibility in terms of working practices to understand the consequences of maternity leave, but in return ask for flexibility from the employee. This is of particular relevance when they change working habits, for example working 3 or 4 days per week, which impacts on their colleagues and members of staff.

Fundamentally, the survey has identified the urgent need for the industry to take positive action, both in recognising the issues and creating practical and realistic solutions which can be implemented to improve internal employee relations (especially at senior level) and the overall productivity of the organisation.

The outcome of the round table discussion has resulted in Best Practice Recommendations - see pages 11-15.

The following pages summarise key questions and responses from both parties plus details of participant profiles and survey methodology.

**SURVEY PARTICIPANTS**

The 550 women and men who participated were recruited from key Communications Industry professions. Employees surveyed were exclusively women in middle to senior management positions, whereas employers surveyed were a mix of senior women and men.

**Employees – Profile**

**ALL WOMEN**

**Age**

44.7% (Majority) aged 26 – 34

21.1% (Second tier) aged 35 – 40

**Work Position**

59% (Majority) classified as Middle Management

35% Director level

6% Board Director/MD/CEO

**Work Basis**

44.8% Agency

44.2% In-house

11% Freelance

**Work Type**

89.5% full time

10.5% part time

**Employers – Profile**

**MALE 60.6%**

**FEMALE 39.4%**

**Most significant age groups**

33.5% aged 41 – 50

25.6% aged 35 – 40

22.8% aged 26 – 34

**Work Type**

74% Consultancy

26% In-house Communications Department

**Overall Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>% Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not currently in work but interested in subject (default to Employee survey)</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total female/male split**

WOMEN 68.5%

Of whom 71.5% employees, 28.5% employers

MEN 30.5%

All employers

**SurvEy PartICIPantS**

The 550 women and men who participated were recruited from key Communications Industry professions. Employees surveyed were exclusively women in middle to senior management positions, whereas employers surveyed were a mix of senior women and men.
Communications Industry Sectors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Specialism</th>
<th>% Employees</th>
<th>% Employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Affairs</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Research</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Branding</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Consultancy</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Industry sectors interviewed included Pharma/Health, Corporate, Financial, IT, Consumer, Public Sector and Digital.

N.B. There were no obvious distinctions in responses from the respective business areas and sectors.

Parental Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>% Employees</th>
<th>% Employers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have children</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>61.0 (Men 70.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You/partner currently pregnant</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intending to have children in next 9 – 24 months</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This highlights the significance of the issue – over three-quarters of employees are affected by the maternity / childcare discussion with their employer. Nearly a fifth of employers are directly affected by personal pregnancy / impending family implications. However, only 30% of female employers currently have children, unlike their male counterparts, the majority of whom have families (70.4%).

A senior female employer commented:
"Male colleagues use maternity leave as a chance to edge out female colleagues. Women without children do the same. I am terrified to have children for that reason."

METHODOLOGY

550 women and men participated in the study in a two-part survey:

Employee Survey – aimed at women classifying themselves as employees from middle to senior management.

Employer Survey – aimed at women and men classifying themselves as employers i.e. responsible for recruitment of senior managers or as independent business owners who were not part of a large organisation (and in that case, self-classified as employees).

The survey was managed via the Hanson Search and CIPR databases, their websites, Facebook pages and other web-links such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

Analysis was conducted on behalf of Hanson Search by PR agency Rock PR, in association with BMH Marketing Communications.

www.rock-pr.com

Subsequent actions have included the publication of this report and a round table discussion involving key stakeholders to establish best practice recommendations within the Communications Industry. This is summarised in the section entitled ‘Best Practice Recommendations’ pages 11 – 15.
KEY FINDINGS

Employee Survey

Have you observed any issues or problems for you or colleagues directly related to returning from maternity leave? Tick all that apply.

- Difficulty with flexible working hours: 64.6%
- Negotiating part time employment: 53.2%
- Reduction in perceived status: 59.5%
- Reduced responsibility vs. pre-maternity: 44.3%

What impact has this had or could have on your attitude to the workplace and your employer? Tick all that apply.

- Anger: 22.7%
- Resentment: 38.1%
- Frustration: 48.5%
- Disillusionment: 38.1%
- Considering seeking employment elsewhere: 48.5%
- Considering changing industries: 13.4%
- Considering giving up work completely: 14.4%
- Accept it for what it is and just get on with it: 34.0%

There is an acceptance however, that the situation can work both ways:

- “Rightly or wrongly, it does make me understand attitudes where organisations are reluctant to take on women of child-bearing age, especially when those women adopt an attitude of ‘entitlement’ to special treatment.”

Of the potential long term concerns for women considering or taking maternity leave, which would you say is the SINGLE BIGGEST issue?

- Fear of losing status/authority: 29.9%
- Financial implications: 20.4%
- Wastage of experienced talent exiting the industry: 8.0%
- Discrimination against women taking & maintaining senior positions: 24.1%
- Lack of confidence in ability to return to work & perform as effectively: 13.2%
- N/A: 4.4%

When asked to tick ‘all that applied’ from the above list, nearly half (48.2%) of the participants agreed with the issue of loss of confidence. Fear of losing status/authority scored 78.4% overall. This is an area which clearly needs to be addressed. Inevitably, flexible working hours is the most popular demand, but careful consideration of the job specification prior to returning and options for enabling an easier transition generated a lot of interest.

What do you think would be good practice for organisations in encouraging women to return back to employment following maternity leave? Tick all that apply.

- Flexible working hours/working arrangements: 83.8%
- More focused/precise job description to define the role for greater efficiency and productivity: 38.2%
- Post-maternity job-related ‘refresher tutorials’ before returning to work: 30.9%
- Better tax breaks from the Government for child care: 46.3%

Status change and reduced career development potential are both major factors in causing women to feel aggrieved:

- “My problem has been returning to a different role, with a different team and accounts – backward step.”
- “My job currently works well and doesn’t need adapting. The issues surround my enjoyment due to my declined status and future opportunities.”

“Accept it for what it is and just get on with it”. 34.0%
"I REALLY like the refresher tutorials idea, especially if you have taken a longer maternity leave."

"One to one coaching would help balance demands of work/life and loss of confidence when returning to work."

There was also a call for procedural changes in companies:

"We need a proper set of procedures so that if childcare interferes with the job requirements at short notice, everyone knows what can be expected of them – especially the 'returning' woman."

"It is a difficult thing to balance and it is also important to see the employer’s viewpoint too. The best solution is to find practical ways to reduce her workload while ensuring she doesn't lose her status or authority, nor move from a strategic to a tactical role."

The majority also expressed a desire to reduce certain aspects of their role, such as being on call 24/7 (52.9%) and late nights in the office (77.9%).

However, 70% of women felt that forthcoming change is unlikely and many expressed opinions about how people need to be realistic about what they can or should be expecting to happen. This generated some lively comment:

"Women are their own worst enemies, they need to stop whinging and make fathers do half the parenting duties rather than expecting special treatment."

"Big business increasingly requires 24/7/365 commitment. This applies to our male colleagues also. It is part driven by technology, part by austerity i.e. get as much work as possible from the fewest people and part by globalisation."

"Employers don't have to do anything to address the tax break issue and the Government can't afford to."

Comparing agencies vs. in-house was explored, with a general consensus (71%) agreeing that on the whole, in-house provides more of a classic HR structure. One participant explained:

"In-house allows you to be more in control of your workload. In agency there’s more chance of an urgent client request at the end of your day."

Finally, on the value of working mothers…

"If managers realised they are getting a more efficient output for less cost... they might consider mothers differently and place a greater value on what they bring to their teams."

**KEY FINDINGS**

**Employer Survey**

Whilst the majority of those surveyed had no reservations about hiring women aged 30-40, 9.4% did so. Interestingly, only 5% of male participants agreed but 14% of women were open about the issue of recruiting women of child-bearing age.

Those who commented were mainly positive about working mothers:

"Mothers returning to work are much more efficient with their time."

"Not relevant – experience and personal qualities are all we consider – our company by coincidence is mainly composed of this group."

But once the survey began to probe associated issues, employers began to reveal their real opinions on the disruption caused by maternity leave, although a quarter insisted they had no concerns.

What concerns you when a member of the senior management team takes maternity leave?

Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client/supplier issues</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strained internal resources</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost implications</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No concerns</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are the long term concerns/fears for employers if their senior female employees are considering or taking maternity leave? Tick all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business stability/impact</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing valuable resources</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge to fill the recruitment gap</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing upheaval and the knock-on effect</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the associated comments focused on the issue of flexibility:

"All manageable, but part time returns are an issue (all on a Friday) and requests for working from home which disrupts teams and places burden on staff at work."

"In my experience, many women will assure a company that they intend to return immediately following maternity leave, however when the time comes, they often decide not to return. This has a major impact on the business, particularly if the job has been held open for them."

Some respondents were more contentious:

"It’s contagious and expensive."

"You have to walk on eggshells...."
BESt PraCtICE rECommEndatIonS

Flexible working is very difficult in a client-facing environment. ‘They don’t work flexibly.’

“We find 3 days a week is fine if non-client facing (depending on specifics of job role). If client facing, then 4 days is a minimum, really. Any less means short-changing the client and an unfair burden on other colleagues.”

And finally, on working mothers and women in the workplace…

There were mixed views on whether the employee had one or more children – 58.8% believe that it makes little difference but 30.9% observed that with more children, the demands for flexibility increase. Conversely, 18.2% agreed that with a growing family there is more reliance on childcare – therefore increasing motivations to earn a higher salary.

There is sympathy among this group that best practice for maternity leave is an important area. However, many then commented that the feasibility of flexibility is another issue. 39.6% were confident that change is ‘quite likely’.

“Flexible working is great for staff but not necessarily for a company, plus there is little acceptance of reducing salary to account for home-based work or reduced work time relative to a full time office-based person: fairness must work for everyone – single people, men, mothers etc – we can’t just offer this for one category of employee.”

“Better tax breaks sound great in principle but aren’t feasible.”

“Working mothers need to be more transparent about their level of dedication to the job.”

“I am still dumbstruck by the number of women in very senior positions…while they seem to break through in terms of multi-tasking and client management, when it comes to bigger strategic decisions they are woefully under-represented.”

“Thank you for looking into this subject – very important to get the balance right.”

A Round Table discussion meeting held at Hanson Search was staged to debate and examine key issues affecting women and men in communications regarding the return to work after maternity leave.

Participants included:

Afua Basoah
Director at Ogilvy Healthworld

Kevin Bell
Executive Chairman of Maitland Political

Caroline Black
Director of Caroline Black & Associates

Rachael Robertson
Head of Government Affairs at DIAGEO

Nichola Scola
Head of Media Relations, EMEA, Nomura

Caroline Sharp
Director of Way Ahead Research

Jennifer Thomas
Corporate Communications at RBS

Alice Weightman
Managing Director of Hanson Search

Mary Whemman
Managing Director, Corporate & Financial at Grayling

Jane Wilson
Chief Executive Officer of CIPR

Conclusions

When it comes to maternity leave, especially among senior women in the communications industry, times have changed, with a growing demand for honest dialogue and realistic expectations on both sides from the outset. Whilst working mothers can appear to ‘have it all’, the message ringing out is simply - just not all of the time…

The increasing focus for individuals and businesses surrounds the maternity comeback, nurturing and encouraging senior talent to return as major assets to enhance both the culture and organisational success of the company.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that maternity leave can cause short term issues for employers, the principle of planning time should be embraced, with ‘that discussion’ ideally taking place as soon as the pregnancy is confirmed, thereby allowing sufficient time for all to prepare and restructure.

By failing to act both positively and proactively there is a danger that middle to senior management women will either terminate their employment or reconsider their future options, which could impact long-term on the quality of talent available within the recruitment market.

So how exactly do you stop your best talent becoming your best competitor?
Summary of Best Practice Recommendations:

1. Creating the Right Company Culture
Employers must create a culture and environment which encourages transparency and openness to drive discussion and re-establish core job priorities.

2. Taking Responsibility
It’s not just about entitlement but a two-way fairness policy - the employee being honest and realistic about their future plans once their pregnancy is announced and the employer ensuring a seamless transition.

3. Devising a Maternity Comeback Framework
Employees taking responsibility for creating a framework structure which details measurable deliverables and output – a plan of action for how they see their new role and how productivity / excellence translates.

4. Reappraising the Legal Situation
Distinguishing reality from myth when it comes to maternity rights – the facts summarised.

Creating the Right Company Culture

It is the responsibility of employers to create an open and honest environment to encourage a two-way flow discussion, which allows the employee a realistic opportunity to articulate their future plans before returning back to work. Practical support needs to be introduced to help nurture the individual and ease the transition from a business and personal perspective.

Activation:

- Employers should create a comfortable environment which supports all women (pregnant or with children) and their partners to talk freely about their future plans (which may change overtime) via e.g. informal catch up sessions, contact and involvement during maternity leave
- Where feasible, establish an internal mentoring system which allows the returning employee to discuss their situation with someone who has direct experience and can therefore impart helpful and practical advice
- Introduce refresher tutorials (either in house or via a third party) to stimulate employee confidence and help ‘brush up’ skill sets

Devising a Maternity Comeback Framework

It is imperative that middle to senior management employees who become pregnant inform their employers sooner rather than later to enable an effective transition process. Too often, the ‘announcement’ is declared late which can have a detrimental effect on colleagues, immediate teams and clients. Planning for maternity cover is therefore a vital part of the overall business agenda.

Activation:

- Employers to introduce ‘New Arrivals’ policy which allows employees to talk freely (and in confidence) to their direct line manager about their ‘news’ as early as possible (preferably after 12 week scan), without fear of discrimination or losing status
- Employee needs to think through their likely plans on return as soon as possible – what is the most likely and realistic scenario? This again allows employers to plan and prepare over a longer time period if it is clear that they will wish to work part time, even if only initially

Taking Responsibility

It is the responsibility of employers to introduce key training initiatives for all employees to drive the strategic priority of building a more supportive workplace. One example is a Diversity Workshop to include awareness and understanding among employees regarding senior women returning from maternity leave, fostering a work environment which is free from discrimination.

- Introduce 360° appraisals from both clients and teams to feedback constructively on how the new working arrangement is taking shape/adding value. Evaluate own interactions with fellow employees
- Establish the equivalent of a ‘succession planning’ process policy which kicks in as soon as the news is announced, to include: team structure assessment and adjustment, involving the employee fully in key decisions (e.g. does the position need to be covered temporarily by a freelance resource, if so, allow sufficient handover time, team bonding etc or will an existing colleague assume short term additional responsibility, if so, are they happy about this etc), client briefing (policy should include clear guidelines for when and how they are told of the impending changes)
- Introduce key training initiatives for all employees ensuring that the employee is aware of, understands and is comfortable with the changes.

Framework

It is crucial that employees take responsibility for their own ‘outputs’ and effectively and successfully manage their employer’s expectations to everyone’s mutual benefit. This could utilise the following suggested format:

Activation:

- A realistic and truthful self-assessment by the individual regarding their priorities and therefore likely ‘outputs’
- If it is clear that the job specification needs to change, define and agree the detail of this as soon as possible and brief all colleagues directly affected
- Construct a personal business plan for discussion (and negotiation) with their employer which demonstrates a thorough understanding of how their role will be affected against ‘deliverables’ including remote working hours with anticipated results
- Engage with all team members to ensure transparency and avoid resentment
- Evaluate results after initial three months to assess effectiveness and review thereafter on a quarterly basis, including decisions on whether the employment contract requires revision
Reappraising the Legal Situation

Employees are entitled to certain family rights, including maternity leave and pay, paternity leave, parental leave and a right to request flexible working. The problem is that many people automatically assume that there are legal pitfalls and issues when there might not be.

Activation:
The issue of pregnancy and maternity leave is a complex area of the law, much of which depends on timing and communication between employers and employees. To assist both parties, there is a framework of statutory rights in place to protect pregnant employees, including those taking and returning from maternity leave. The framework provides the minimum entitlement, whilst allowing employers to agree to more favourable terms should they wish to. Employees should note that they cannot agree to less favourable terms than the statutory rights provide.

The statutory rights pregnant employees should expect are as follows:

• Reasonable paid time off during working hours for antenatal appointments

• Health and Safety protection while pregnant and breastfeeding

• Up to 52 weeks’ maternity leave, consisting of 26 weeks’ ordinary maternity leave and a further 26 weeks’ additional maternity leave

• Statutory Maternity Pay for up to 39 weeks

• The right to return to the same job

• Priority for alternative employment in redundancy cases

• The right to request flexible working conditions on an employees’ return to work; and

• Protection from dismissal, detriment or discrimination by reason of pregnancy or maternity

• The majority of these rights are provided for in the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Maternity and Parental Leave etc Regulations 1999 (MPL Regulations).

Please see Appendix 2 for further information provided by Follett Stock London.

Making it Happen – Industry Networking

In helping drive positive organisational change and influence a mindset shift, which refuses to accept that a talent drain is permitted, it is critical that momentum continues – not only in helping retain top talent within the workplace, but ultimately reducing the gender diversity gap among senior women returning from maternity leave.

In doing so, it is imperative that we aim to encourage wider-reaching networks and partnerships across like-minded organisations to share experiences/best practices which will enhance working culture. So how can this translate into a tangible output?

The professional bodies of the Communications Industry currently undertake a good deal of work to drive forward equality and gender balance within the profession. As a commitment to adding momentum to this work, Hanson Search will lead and manage an independent Gender Balance Task Force – a central collaborative hub of key stakeholders, to provide crucial resource and support for both employers and employees who are seeking advice and guidance on maternity issues, return to work and work life balance.

Possible Task Force Activities:

• Create a specific online resource portal with a facility for interaction

• Introduce a calendar of events to include training initiatives (mentoring, workshop facilitation), refresher tutorials, new legislation briefings

• Establish a template for a three month ‘parental transition phase’ geared towards enabling employees to return successfully to their role to everyone’s mutual benefit

• Organise ‘drop in’ consultation clinics

• Create best practice modular templates

• Recognition of working mothers who bring added value into the work place – e.g. business awards scheme across industry, supported by industry bodies

• Investigate opportunities for government lobbying/MP support for change – with the Communications Industry leading the charge
APPENDIX 1

Round Table Participants – Key Observations and Suggestions

AFUA BASOAH
Director at Ogilvy Healthworld

"Until my own recent departure from a working environment in order to have children, I had little appreciation of issues facing senior women returning to the workplace after maternity leave. I have met women from all walks of professional life during my time on maternity leave, from barristers to scientists, from board room executives to those starting their professional lives. The subject of effectively balancing life as a 'good' parent and a successful professional is one that unites many parents across industries. As we know, it's difficult for most professionals (parents and non-parents alike) to get the right work-life balance, let alone trying to do so with the unpredictability of children thrown into the mix.

Key to positive change is the eradication of any fear and uncertainty felt by both parties by ensuring an honest, open environment exists to allow a two-way dialogue regarding the realistic expectations and needs of both employer and employee once a decision to return to the working environment is made (this may be before, during or at the end of maternity leave). I passionately believe that if an employee is committed to working hard for a business (with a focus on delivery/outputs) and an employer is committed to embracing the flexibility that allows for employees to perform to their highest potential (whether this is flexible working hours, refresher courses, off-site working etc), a win-win situation is possible. This dialogue is akin to the re-calibration of the employee/employer relationship post-maternity/paternity leave!"

CAROLINE BLACK
Director, Caroline Black & Associates

"The workshops, seminars and team away days I run are full of young professionals in their late twenties and early thirties giving 150% to their careers. Just as they are developing the skills and confidence that’s needed to handle senior roles, they exit stage left with the arrival of children and it’s too hard to keep going to that level. Compared to other industries, this skews the communications business disproportionately. We’ve created - and we tolerate and even suggest it can’t be any other way - working environments where older women in particular don’t exist; this is not just an issue about gender difference it’s also about ageism. And that’s not just a stupid waste of skills, it’s also discriminatory.

"THE key solution to instigate positive change:
Start actively recruiting returners and older women - and men for that matter. People who have wide life experience over and above drinking margaritas and carrying a Chloe handbag. People with a grip on the realities of life in the UK. Recruit those who have kept up with the changes in the communications industry. Who have invested in CPD. Who are energetic, able, interested. And offer them top-up training if they need it. In a few years we might see a communications industry that more closely reflects life in the UK and organisations in other sectors."

CAROLINE SHARP
Director, Way Ahead Research

“It’s evident from this research (and from my experience) that women continue frequently to experience a double whammy during their careers in the communications industry. They often choose to take a step back after having children, because it’s so hard to combine the demands of managing clients with the demands of managing a family. Then, when they decide they want to return, they struggle to do so because the industry tends to prefer younger pre-family employees to older family (with all their attendant commitments). This is hard for the individuals concerned, a waste of good and expensively trained talent, and makes no sense given that the industry makes its money from targeting women and men of all ages (and life-stages).

"THE key solution to instigate positive change:
In reality the only real solution will be the introduction of quotas on the number of female Directors. Only then will employers take the proportion of senior females, and the need to recruit and retain experienced female employees, seriously."

JENNIFER THOMAS
Corporate Communications at RBS

“For me, returning to work following maternity leave can present a host of emotions and issues. While everyone's experience can differ, both in a positive and negative way, in general I don't believe there is a thorough understanding of how much a woman has to juggle both in her work life and family life. This results in the misconception that women somehow have to make a distinct choice with little advice or options as to how to manage both. Having children does not automatically make you ineffective in the workplace, yet this is often how mothers are perceived when they return to work. I believe having a successful career and a fruitful family is equally as important and is achievable, but the right support system and confidence needs to be in place."

MARY WHENMAN
Managing Director, Corporate & Financial at Grayling

"As the mother of three boys with a demanding PR career, supporting women when they return to work after maternity leave is a topic about which I am passionate. In a female dominated industry, which sees high attrition rates amongst senior women, it seems that some amazing talent is being unnecessarily lost. So what to do to help bridge the widening gender gap and ensure there is sufficient female representation at a senior level? Interestingly, for an industry which is based on communication, we don't seem to be terribly good at it when discussing returning to work. Both employees and employers need to be more open and more honest. Women returners need to be more honest with themselves about what they want out of their careers once they have had children and how they are going to be able to deliver the outputs their employers need. Equally, employers need to be more flexible around working hours and resources.

For me the solution is two-fold – women returners should be assigned a mentor in the months leading up to and after their return to work to enable more open and honest communication around their return; and flexible working needs to be embraced on both sides which supports the delivery of the outputs and outcomes that employers need."

Although most organisations have some sort of policy in place, I believe this can only be achieved by having open dialogue so that both parties can take equal accountability and responsibility for deliverables. That way the employer can have more confidence that the workload will not slip and the employee can feel confident that they have the ability and scope to deliver at work whilst also being able to be there for their family at home."
APPENDIX 2

Legal Position – Further Details and Comment

NOTIFICATION
For all involved notification of the pregnancy is extremely important. For employees, notification at a particular time allows them to benefit from certain rights, such as the entitlement to take time off for antenatal appointments and for certain health and safety protection to apply. More importantly, employees cannot rely on protection against discrimination or dismissal until they have notified their employer that they are pregnant. Notification should be done no later than the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth (EWC). The EWC runs from Sunday to Saturday and is the week in which childbirth is expected to occur. It is better for both parties for notice to be given in writing stating the fact the employee is pregnant, the EWC and the date when the employee intends to start OML (this date can be no earlier than 15th week before the EWC).

DURING MATERNITY LEAVE
In order to encourage more effective communication between employers and employees during the maternity leave the law provides that there should be reasonable contact and Keeping-In-Touch (KIT) days. Reasonable contact time can be used to discuss the employees return to work or to keep them informed of developments. In order to account for varying preferences, arrangements can be made before maternity leave starts to discuss the level of communication the employee receives. KIT days however are days for employees to undertake actual work for which they can be paid for. It is important to note that employers do not have the right to require employees to work KIT days. Furthermore, employees do not have the right to work KIT days without the employers’ agreement.

RETURNING TO WORK
If an employee wishes to postpone their return to work this can be done by agreement, taking parental leave (having given 21 days’ notice), taking annual leave or taking sick leave. Upon returning, all employees have the right to return to the same job than they were employed in before their absence. They should also be entitled to benefit from and improvements they would have been entitled to had they not been absent.

FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUESTS
Lastly, it seems that with regards to flexible working requests there is a considerable amount of tension and misunderstanding. In brief, an employee has the right to request flexible working patterns if they have a child under the age of 17 or a disabled child under the age of 18. Once a request is made employers must give proper consideration to the request and may only refuse applications on certain grounds. Section 80 G of the Employment Rights Act 1996 set out the eight specific grounds for rejecting a request, these are as follows:

- The burden of additional costs
- Detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand
- Inability to re-organise work among existing staff
- Inability to recruit additional staff
- Detrimental impact on quality
- Detrimental impact on performance
- Insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes to work
- Planned structural changes

Employees whose requests were refused have limited grounds to bring a claim in the Employment Tribunal. Specifically they can bring a claim if: The employer failed to deal with the request in accordance with the Procedure Regulations by failing to:
1. hold a meeting
2. notify a decision or
3. offer a right of appeal

Lee Xavier, Solicitor, Follett Stock London Employment Team
APPENDIX 3

About Hanson Search

Hanson Search is a leading executive search and selection consultancy specialising in all areas of strategic communications serving the UK, European and global markets. Established in 2002 Hanson Search has offices in London, Paris and Dubai.

Helping clients achieve their goals through supplying high calibre professionals in the areas of public relations, public affairs, advertising, digital, branding, market research, and strategic consultancy, Hanson Search specialises in mid to senior level placements across permanent and interim requirements.

Expertise in searching for outstanding individuals, building teams locally and opening oversee offices/departments across Europe, Middle East, Asia and the Emerging Market.

www.hansonsearch.com

About Follett Stock

Follett Stock is a progressive full service law firm specialising in delivering bespoke, practical and creative solutions to legal problems. They offer a fully comprehensive range of legal services to both individuals and businesses within a number of industry sectors.

The Employment Team in the London office covers all aspects of employment law, both contentious and non-contentious, and acts for employers and employees alike, from large corporations to small companies. They provide representation at Employment Tribunals and have litigated in the courts. In conjunction with the Commercial Team, they can assist with the employment aspects of business transfers and acquisitions.

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About CIPR

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the professional body for PR practitioners in the UK. Founded in February 1948 as the Institute of Public Relations, by 2009 it had grown to over 9000 members involved in all aspects of the public relations industry, and is the largest body of its type in Europe.

The CIPR advances the PR industry in the UK by making its members accountable through a code of conduct, developing policies for the PR industry, representing its members, and raising standards through education and training.

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