

Working Paper No. 5

Flexible work arrangements: work life balance (Part of the Gender Worx Working Paper Series)

By Karen Morley, PhD, Co-founder Gender Worx



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Flexible work arrangements: work life balance

Offering flexible working arrangements and personalised career paths adjusted to work-life balance needs is required to retain the best talent (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger & Baumgarten 2007). A one size fits all solution for advancing in an organisation is no longer adequate. Instead, individual women's needs and circumstances, both short term and long term, need to be taken into account. Men too seek flexible arrangements which when available and taken result in increased motivation, loyalty and career satisfaction (Wittenberg-Cox 2010). For example, the University of Western Australia experienced an increase in male staff accessing extended leave options for family reasons. They attribute this to the University's long standing focus on removing structural barriers and opening up of flexible provisions that can be used by anyone (EOWA 2010c).

Women are still more likely than men to pursue a flexible career path or take an extended leave of absence, and they are twice as likely to work part-time (36% versus 19%) in order to meet their commitments to their families. The onus generally remains on women to negotiate their own flexible arrangements (Piterman 2010).

Because of their family demands, women tend to feel more time-pressured and dissatisfied as their working hours increase while the time men spend at work has little impact on their feelings of pressure (Eagly & Carli 2007a).

In a study of European managers, women who attained middle and senior roles did not regret their career orientation nor their income nor intellectual stimulation: they were however mixed in terms of whether the impact of their career success on their work-life balance was positive. Interestingly, the results were similar for men and women regardless of whether or not they had children (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger & Baumgarten 2008).

Another Australian study (Insync Surveys 2010) found that women were more likely than men (48% versus 41%) to leave their employer in order to seek a better work-life balance. Lack of flexibility and choice were amongst the most important factors that influenced a woman's decision to leave her organisation. Highly female dominated administrative, clerical and lower level management roles paradoxically offer less flexibility in setting working hours than male-dominated professional and executive roles (Eagly & Carli 2007a).

IBM Australia promotes work life issues each year for the month of October. During that time, they profile employees who use flexible work and leave options to encourage and support the use of flexible arrangements so that staff achieve satisfaction in their professional and work aspirations (EOWA 2010c). Deloitte calculated its flexibility program had saved an estimated \$41.5million in global turnover costs in one year alone (Catalyst 2009).

There is abundant evidence that organisations' espoused and lived values do not always align when it comes to supporting flexible arrangements. The full-time worker model remains the prevailing paradigm (Piterman 2010). Making flexible arrangements available to be tailored to the needs of employees enables greater talent retention.



About Gender Worx

Gender Worx is a specialist gender diversity practice. We are thought leaders, experts and consultants to organisations in gender diversity measurement and change. We assist organisations to unlock the potential of women and help make organisations:

- better places to work; and
- more productive and profitable

Gender Worx is a specialist division of Insync Surveys, stakeholder survey and consulting specialists and a 2009 BRW Fast 100 Company.

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Contact Gender Worx
at the following offices
of Insync Surveys

Melbourne
Level 7
91 William Street
Melbourne
VIC 3000
Australia
Tel. +61 3 9909 9209
Fax. +61 3 9614 4460

Sydney
Level 2
110 Pacific Highway
North Sydney
NSW 2060
Australia
Tel. +61 2 8081 2000
Fax. +61 2 9955 8929



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www.elizabethisdrawing.com

Working Paper No. 6

Flexible work arrangements: infrastructure support (Part of the Gender Worx Working Paper Series)

By Karen Morley, PhD, Co-founder Gender Worx



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Flexible work arrangements: infrastructure support

To support leading gender diversity policies, organisations ensure that there is cultural alignment so that policy is executed. Management support is a key requirement. In addition, practical support including availability and use of the appropriate technology and systems supports flexible arrangements, including working from home.

Organisations such as Lenovo have instigated a new management model that enables greater freedom in where and how their staff work. Rules are relaxed, office hours are more flexible and there is less centralised control over work. The central organising mechanisms for work are setting clear objectives and motivating people to do their work. By making working hours flexible, and aligning effort to purpose and objectives, a broader diversity of talent can be engaged and retained (Wittenberg-Cox 2010).

Catalyst's best practice organisations offered reduced working weeks, flexible arrival and departure times, telecommuting, compressed working weeks and job sharing in their efforts to increase flexibility (Catalyst 2009).

Such innovations rely on good technological support, enabling access to the full range of tools required to get the job done. Training employees in the use of appropriate technologies and how they can be used across sites and from home helps support smarter working practices (Sabattini, Warren, Dinolfo, Falk & Castro 2010). Without such support, flexibility can be rendered meaningless.

In Catalyst's study, the organisations pursuing these practices experienced job engagement and commitment 10% higher than organisations not pursuing them, intention to remain in the organisation was 23% higher and job satisfaction was 44% higher, indicating the power of supporting flexibility at work with the right infrastructure (Catalyst 2009).



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Working Paper No. 7

Flexible work arrangements: career advancement (Part of the Gender Worx Working Paper Series)

By Karen Morley, PhD, Co-founder Gender Worx



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Flexible work arrangements: career advancement

Combining flexible working paths with continued career progression is challenging, yet fundamental to achieving diversity goals. Child rearing responsibilities generally coincide with moves into middle level managerial roles, yet the increased time commitments and pressures of middle management are seen as incompatible with family responsibilities (Nesbit & Seeger 2007). Family responsibilities are seen as barriers to women's availability for work, and availability is considered essential for promotion (Chinchilla, León, Torres & Canela 2006).

There is an implicit assumption that working part-time is an indication of a lack of ambition; women's ambition is seen to inevitably disappear once they have children (Sools, Van Engen & Baerveldt 2007). Women who *are* committed to their careers and seek to improve their status may nevertheless be seen as less committed by the organisation if they take advantage of flexible work arrangements and family friendly opportunities (Furst & Reeves 2008).

Liff & Ward (2001) draw attention to a 'hypocrisy gap' in organisations. While 55% of managers in their study reported that their organisation provides flexible work provisions as an ethical requirement, only 30% said they actually deliver them.

Hays supports senior women in management holding flexible and part-time managerial roles. They have achieved 52% female managers, 62% of staff in part-time positions and 15% of part-time staff hold senior managerial roles (EOWA 2010c). IBM Australia pioneered a job share arrangement for two senior women returning from parental leave and who both wanted to work part-time. They jointly manage a team of approximately 70 people. The shared role enables them to maintain their career goals (EOWA 2010c).

Organisations may or may not be aware of the full extent of career compromise they create, as women experiencing rigidity or insensitivity to family issues are more likely to quit quietly than to ask for what they need (Reinhold 2005).



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