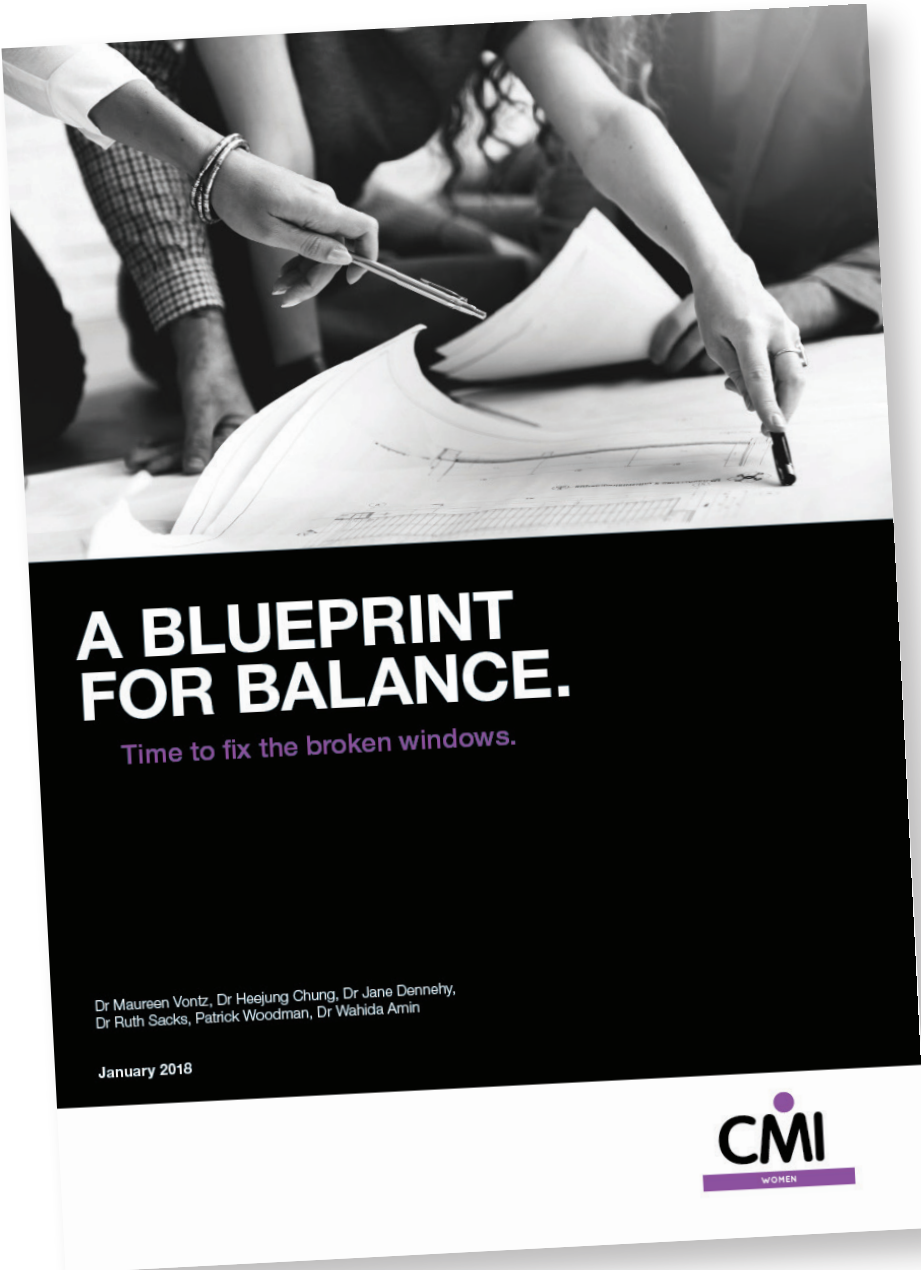


→ MAKING FLEXIBLE WORKING WORK FOR EVERYONE



A BLUEPRINT FOR BALANCE.

**Unlocking the six
key areas to
achieving gender
balance.**

CMI's research charts employers' current approaches to achieving gender balance and showcases the best-in-class practices that are starting to achieve real change. From our survey of managers, in-depth interviews and employer best practices conversations, it's clear that organisations have much more to do to close the gap between rhetoric and reality.

**For the full report and recommendations on
CMI Women's Blueprint for Balance,
visit www.managers.org.uk/brokenwindows
[@cmi_managers](https://twitter.com/cmi_managers) and [#CMIWomen](https://twitter.com/CMIWomen)**

MAKING FLEXIBLE WORKING WORK FOR EVERYONE

Flexible working is an important component of creating gender balance. The majority of managers regard it positively and enjoy its benefits, but leaders need to prevent any ‘stigma’ being associated with flexible work by finding role models to normalise its use for family reasons, especially by men.

Flexible working can mean many things: working from home, working compressed hours, term-time hours, part-time or flexi-time working. It has become an umbrella term to describe all kinds of working outside traditional 9-to-5 office hours. However it’s defined, it’s widely regarded as an important way to improve gender balance, for two main reasons.

Firstly, allowing women to work flexibly – for family or non-family reasons – and produce the same output as non-flexible workers allows them to have the same opportunities for promotion. Secondly, and simultaneously, allowing men to work flexibly can make it easier for families to rebalance family duties.

Our survey found 78% of managers use some form of flexible working, with 70% using flexi-time, flexible scheduling or working from home on occasion.

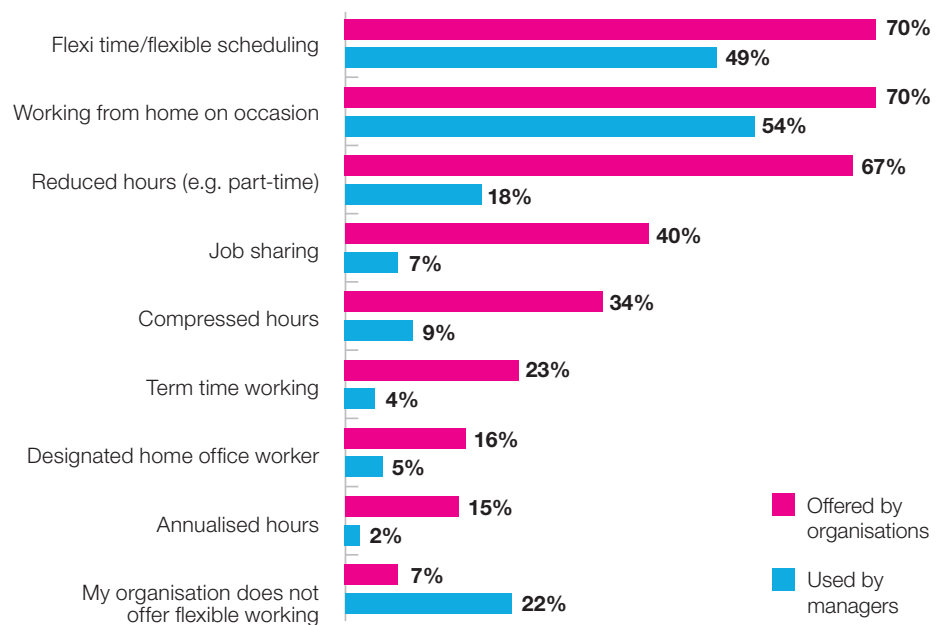


Figure 1: Types of flexible working

Two-thirds of managers agree that flexible working has supported their career. This is particularly true for female managers (71%, compared to 57% among male managers).

Managers also endorse flexible working's benefits for organisations. Just under half (48%) believe that it makes for a more productive workforce. 64% agree that it creates a more family-friendly culture while just over a third (37%) agreed that flexible working creates a more gender-equal workforce.

Those managers who use flexi-time, working from home on occasion and job sharing were the most likely to give their organisation top marks on the question of whether its flexible working practices support gender diversity. These arrangements can be crucial in allowing women to stay in employment after childbirth.⁹

Getting flexible working right: managers' challenges

Just over a quarter of managers report that their organisation experiences no challenges in implementing flexible working, but many did perceive challenges. Top of the list was making it harder to collaborate effectively (43%).

Flexible workers are also perceived as being more difficult to manage: one-third of managers state that it can be difficult to manage team members who work flexibly.

Only 13% identify a challenge of stigma associated with flexible working – though this splits 17% of women and just 10% of men. Our interviews add to recent academic research suggesting that “flexibility stigma” presents crucial pitfalls for organisations to avoid.¹⁰

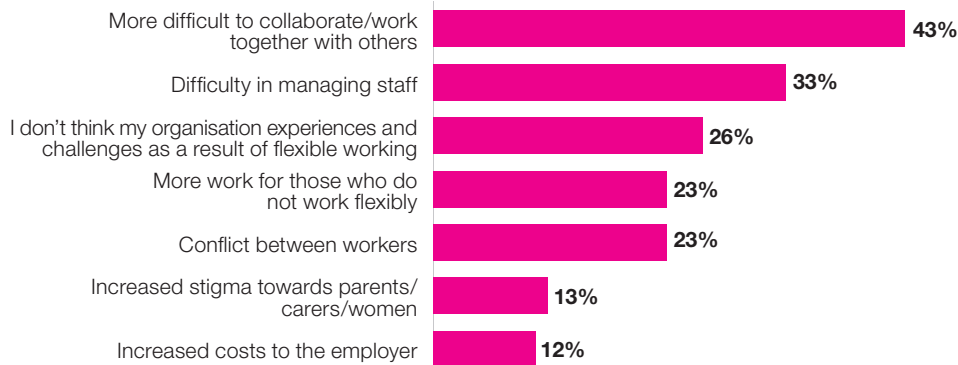


Figure 2: Perceived problems of flexible working

Policy and practice of flexible working can often be at odds

Could flexible working generate effects that hold back, rather than advance, gender balance? There is increasing evidence of significant pitfalls that managers need to avoid.

While intended to support better work-life balance, flexible working can instead lead to longer working hours and overtime hours.¹¹ According to Dr Heejung Chung, University of Kent, there are three key reasons.¹²

First, to reciprocate for the favourable work arrangements “gifted” by their employers, workers expend greater effort, and increase their motivation and commitment, which leads them to work harder and/or longer hours. Where there is negative stigma towards flexible working (see below), workers may feel they have to work even harder to compensate.

Second, employers can increase work intensity through the back door when work becomes detached from fixed hours and more difficult to regulate in terms of hours worked. This is especially true when workers “voluntarily” work longer hours to meet demands at work or when there are incentives for workers to work harder.

Third, flexible working alongside the development of technology, and increased competition in today's workplaces can lead to “enabled intensification” and blurred boundaries,

where a culture of “working everywhere and all the time” develops.

So a culture of presenteeism can penalise both men and women for choosing to work flexibly. “Even though I'm 80% now, I don't just work four days a week,” said a female partner at a professional services firm.

Challenging the “flexibility stigma”

Recent studies show one third of all workers identify a “flexibility stigma” attaching to workers who work flexibly – attitudes that flexible workers are less productive than full time colleagues and contribute less.¹³

The evidence suggests men may be more likely to feel that flexible workers are not as productive, but ‘flexibility stigma’ can affect both men and women. In a series of studies, researchers found men more likely to feel they were penalised for taking leave after the birth of a child and less likely to get pay rises or get promoted; while women who worked reduced hours were given less meaningful assignments.¹⁴

Those themes were borne out in our survey and interviews. The risks were particularly recognised by women. 37% of female managers felt that promotion prospects may be harmed by flexible working, compared to a quarter of men.

¹⁰ Williams, J.C. (2013) The Flexibility Stigma. *Journal of Social Issues* 69(2)

¹¹ Lott, Y. and Chung, H. (2016) Gender discrepancies in the outcomes of schedule control on overtime hours and income in Germany. *European Sociological Review* 32(6): 752-765. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcw032>

¹² Chung, H. (2017) Work Autonomy, Flexibility and Work-Life balance Final report. Canterbury, University of Kent. <http://wafproject.org/research-outputs/final-report/>

¹³ Chung, H. (2017) Work Autonomy, Flexibility and Work-Life balance Final report. Canterbury, University of Kent. <http://wafproject.org/research-outputs/final-report/>

¹⁴ Williams, J.C. (2013) The Flexibility Stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol 69, Issue 2.

One senior female working in technical risk management recounted how she had moved to a three-day week after returning from maternity leave but found it unsustainable. She was co-leading a strategic project and offered to take on additional responsibilities when her co-leader left the business. “My boss said, no way if you’re three days a week. I’ll only entertain it if you’re five days a week. I said 100% no, so he then said he’d put another person in between me and him, so I would be structurally demoted.”

“I felt like I had a gun to my head”, she told us. She returned to working four days. “I had to increase my hours to retain my position”.

Ensuring that flexible workers are not pressured into longer hours, or the subject of unfair stigma, is a key challenge for leaders and line managers at all levels.

Promoting flexible working

Virgin Money has promoted flexible working by updating its technology to enable more employees to work remotely. It has also increased the number of men taking parental leave by matching parental leave pay and maternity pay.

It ensures flexibility is role-modelled at the highest levels and has adopted a policy of at least matching any flexible working arrangements that external hires have with their previous employers.



Deloitte.

Deloitte’s approach: rebranding flexibility as agility and taking Time Out

Generating a better work-life balance for employees and fostering a more family-friendly culture are of course not only benefits for women – they can benefit men just as much. Yet for some organisations there is clear evidence that men seem more reluctant to ask for flexible working than their female counterparts.

“We found that if you mentioned flexible working to many male colleagues, they connected it with women on maternity leave and notions of rigid schedules with slow career progression,” says Emma Codd, Managing Partner for Talent at Deloitte UK. “So Deloitte repositioned it as ‘Agile Working’, emphasising the positives.”

Deloitte’s agile working approach is based on three principles: open and honest communication, trust and respect, and judging only on output. When rolling it out, Emma was convinced about the importance of finding male role models. The firm focused on being clear that success was an arrangement that worked for both the individual and the firm; they also worked hard to find options that were

appealing to their people and also fitted with their business model.

They found that communication was key – “We ran a firmwide campaign where we filmed men leaving early or working from home with a sign that read #agileme... this is what I’m doing,” she says. This helped to reduce any flexibility stigma.

Time Out

‘Time Out’ is a four-week block of unpaid extra leave that can be requested by any eligible employee each financial year.

The policy was designed to recognise that people are balancing commitments and interests outside of work, alongside demanding careers. “Time Out can be used for any number of reasons,” says Clare Rowe, Deloitte’s culture and inclusion lead. These could include: to spend time with family and friends; settle children into school; travel; volunteering; learn something new; or simply catching up with life. Importantly though, no reason needs to be given when employees request a Time Out.

A Time Out request is easy to make via an online form, and can be taken by anyone with more than a year’s service – but key to its success is that it must be taken at a time that suits both the employee and the business.

Most staff use Time Out during quiet periods in their practice and co-ordinate covering their work within their own teams. “The partners and our staff love it and think it’s the best thing we’ve done,” says Codd.

For one senior female associate director, Time Out allows her to stay connected to her family. “Most of my family is abroad. I used to spend my holiday entitlement travelling to see family and feeling guilty about not seeing my elderly parents enough. It meant holidays didn’t feel like rest. The magic four weeks’ uninterrupted leave is how it’s allowed me to structure the rest of the year. So, if I need a break, I can use my holiday allowance and know I’ll still have time for visiting my family.”

Engaging middle managers is essential, as they are key leverage points for shifting the culture when it comes to flexible working.

Aligning policies and middle managers

Some organisations now automatically classify all jobs as flexible – but flexibility remains rare in management roles. Campaign group Timewise has highlighted that only 9.8% of jobs paying over £20,000 are advertised as flexible and CMI has backed calls for jobs to be advertised as ‘flexible by default’, creating a presumption in favour of flexibility.

Engaging middle managers is essential, as they are key leverage points for shifting the culture when it comes to flexible working.

“Line managers are hugely important,” says Emma Avignon, CEO of Mentore Consulting. “They are the prime motivators, inspirers and messengers. If you have a leader managing a team with no experience of how to hold conversations with individual team members on, say, agile working, you will be challenged to make your flexible working policy take hold.”

EXPERT VIEW

Flexible working: the expert view

By Dr Heejung Chung, Reader in Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Kent's School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research

Flexible working has gained attention as a way to enhance workers' work-life balance but also to increase companies performance outcomes. There is a general increase in the use of flexible working practices across European companies. Increasing numbers of countries now provide the right to request flexible working. The European Commission recently included this right as a part of their broader pillar of social rights on work-life balance.

Does flexible working help workers strike a better work-life balance? As shown in many interviews for this report, the ability to work flexibly provides some with the opportunity to remain at their job and in the labour market, especially when there is increased demand on individuals' time and energy. Flexible working has been shown, for example, to reduce significantly women's likelihood of reducing their working hours after the birth of a child¹⁵. There's further evidence that the ability to work flexibly reduces the chances of mothers dropping out of the labour market after the birth of their first child. Given that childbirth and the consequent women's withdrawal from the labour market is one of the most important causes of the persistent gender wage gap and the lack of women in top positions, providing women with better access to flexible working arrangements in their jobs may be key in achieving a more gender-balanced workforce. However, we know that there still exists many obstacles to flexible working. The workers who need them most are still unable to make use of it or may be afraid to take it up due to the possible repercussions.¹⁶

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS



FLEXIBLE WORKING

- Find managers at all levels who are role models for working flexibly for family reasons, especially men.
- Develop campaigns and training to make sure flexible working really works and doesn't create pitfalls for women. Focus on how it can enhance performance outcomes.
- Address the stigma around flexible working. Challenge presumptions based on the long hours culture.

¹⁵ Chung, H. & van der Horst, M. (2018) Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking. *Human Relations* 71(1): 47-72

¹⁶ Chung, H. (2018) Dualization and the access to occupational family-friendly working-time arrangements across Europe. *Social Policy and Administration* online first.