

CITYparents

2019

Cityparents Annual Members Survey
The Results

**WORK/LIFE
BALANCE** **wellbeing**

CAREERS **technology** *flexibility*

The Cityparents Group (www.cityparents.co.uk) comprises three award-winning London-based professional networks, connecting over 16,000 individuals and more than 100 businesses across the City and Canary Wharf.

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Foreword

Our 2019 Annual Member Survey reveals some important areas of progress: City employers are making good strides towards acknowledging new ways of working and the need for an inclusive culture, with progress heralded by a new wave of supportive, often creative initiatives. However, scratch beneath the surface and we see many significant hurdles still to overcome. Change in many places remains superficial, restrained by persistent, limiting cultural attitudes and unsupported by appropriate infrastructure and process.

Ongoing attention to the “War for Talent” battleground continues to encourage window-dressing to benefit recruitment at the expense of supporting the development and retention of existing employees. Flexible working policies have swept over much of the City, and are valued hugely by those who are able to benefit. Yet our survey results show that for a large proportion of individuals, take-up is either not encouraged at all, or merely tolerated, with many respondents citing a culture of mistrust. Countless replies to our questions referenced inherent scepticism from employers, line managers and colleagues that working from home is really that, yet any such belief is unwarranted and out of date in our opinion. Inconsistent implementation and multiple barriers create a real risk that flexible working becomes offered and perceived as an employee perk that does not yield benefits to the employer, and consequently never becomes normalised and embedded in day to day office culture.

For those who do work flexibly, many feel trapped in their roles due to reduced prospects of promotion and/or fear of losing their flexible working arrangement if they change jobs. Career progression remains a widely-accepted casualty. Available career paths are linear and traditional, and fail to allow individuals to adjust their trajectory to complement and support different phases of life. Employers need to recognise the need for individualised career planning in order to benefit fully from the many advantages of having a diverse workforce.

The importance of mental and physical wellbeing in the workplace is becoming increasingly understood, with many of our members citing positive commitments and efforts by their employers to signpost support. Yet individuals perceive that organisational messages in this area are frequently contradicted by internal expectations of workload and client delivery. The impact of long working hours and stressed environments – widely accepted as being part and parcel of City working life – continue to have a huge impact on individuals. Over a third of survey respondents think about changing their role or employer when their workload is at

its heaviest, and over half cannot sleep well and identify breakdowns in personal relationships.

Only by meaningfully engaging clients in the cultural change that is required will employers be able to shift towards a more sustainable mode of delivery and provide a higher quality, responsive service from a genuinely diverse workforce over the longer-term. Those employers that are successful in doing so will win the “War of Retention” too.

The City therefore needs to dig deeper to reach a sustainable way of working and promote pervasive, permanent culture change: **Take an honest look at job design**, workloads and resourcing models. **Reassess people management processes**, so these generate meaningful benefits from flexible working to both the organisation and the individual. **Give visibility to positive role models** to provide real encouragement that policies are not just for show. **Tackle stubborn mindsets. Support the retention of employees** through different life stages by offering adjustable career paths. **Define productivity and trust employees to deliver it**, rather than presume they won't. **Understand better the workplace experiences and ambitions of a diverse workforce**, and support the development of their skills and experiences. **Engage clients and stakeholders** in this wholesale transformation.

Only then will the City arrive at an efficient, productive and healthy way of working that benefits employer, client and employee over the long term.

Louisa Symington-Mills, CEO



Survey Methodology and Demographics

Cityparents' Annual Members Survey 2019 was conducted from 17 June – 23 July 2019

This Survey reflects the views of 683 professionals working in the City and Canary Wharf in London. The gender split is: 85% female, 15% male and 87% of respondents are parents.

Results in-depth

We drew eight key findings from our survey results:

1. Acceptance of flexible work is limited by corporate mistrust and outdated attitudes
2. People feel more productive when working from home, not less
3. Defining productivity is key
4. Good technology and positive digital habits are equally vital
5. City progression and development opportunities strongly favour those who 'fit the mould'
6. Time and interesting work matter the most
7. Employees value career paths that can flex around different life stages
8. The City 'norm' is highly stressful and unsustainable



A word cloud on a dark blue background. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape pointing downwards. The largest word is 'CAREERS' in blue. Other prominent words include 'wellbeing', 'role models', 'family', 'support', 'BALANCE', 'TECHNOLOGY', 'flexibility', 'time', 'work / life', 'HOME', 'productivity', 'respect', 'process', 'paternity', 'children', 'office', 'availability', 'outdated attitudes', 'performance', 'visibility', 'carers', and 'development'. The words are in various colors including blue, orange, green, and light blue.

productivity
respect
CAREERS
work / life **HOME** process
wellbeing
paternity
role models
availability
office
BALANCE flexibility
children **time**
TECHNOLOGY
outdated attitudes
support
family
performance
visibility
carers
development

1. Acceptance of flexible work is limited by corporate mistrust and outdated attitudes

Many City firms have adopted flexible working policies in recent years, so how is the implementation faring in practice? Where it is available, flexible working is widely appreciated and valued by employees who are able to make use of it. However there remain many black spots where flexible work is not a part of organisational policy. Even where such policies do exist, 32% of respondents say that it is not 'open to all'.

This inconsistency of policy application emerges as a major barrier to many individuals who wish to work flexibly. 38% of respondents disagreed that flexible working is 'genuinely encouraged' in their firm, with further themes emerging including untrusting employers, unsupportive workplace culture, lack of visible role models, low numbers of men working flexibly and fears over the potential impact on career progression (44% expressed this concern). 16% would leave the City to find a better work/life balance.

Numerous respondents said they felt they were not trusted to work flexibly and effectively, and repeatedly blamed entrenched attitudes that favour presenteeism based on a misguided belief that this is linked to greater productivity – as one respondent said, **“Too many people refer to ‘shirking from home’ for working from home to be considered a genuine benefit for the organisation and individual”**. These old-fashioned mindsets continue to be a major impediment to cultural change.

Organisations who successfully embed flexible working do so with a culture of trust in their employees.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Rethink the way flexible work policies are implemented to ensure they are fully inclusive. Actively encourage take-up and promote successful working arrangements through internal networks and learning groups. Consciously seek out blockages and tackle stubborn mindsets.

A large number of responses (94%) said they would value positive role models to show that alternative ways of working can be available, supported and successful. Only 42% felt these were currently visible in their firm.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Finding someone senior but relatable who faces similar home/work life dynamics enables employees to believe that there is a way for them to be successful at work and that their personal situation is both understood and respected.

“The culture is slowly changing and improving”

“Flexibility is dependent on immediate management chain. Thus it is applied unfairly across the company, even between departments”

38%

disagreed that flexible working is 'genuinely encouraged' in their firm

“HR supports diversity initiatives at a surface level but I couldn't get one day a week work from home approved “in case I did my washing”. I am a high performing experienced manager”

94%

would value positive role models

“They trust me to adapt myself within the guidelines”

“There are plenty of people working flexibly but not enough is shared with the business on their successes. Too many senior managers do not work flexibly for it to be the norm and it is still seen as a weakness”

2. People feel more productive when working from home, not less

When we asked individuals how productive they felt they were when working from home, 89% of respondents said they felt just as productive when working at home compared to working in the office. Many respondents felt aggrieved that not only was this not acknowledged by their employer, but that they continued to face assumptions that having a flexible working pattern meant lower productivity, which negatively impacted their career opportunities. At the same time, observations were made on the negative impact that office environments can have on working efficiency – **“The “have you got two minutes” desk side conversations that impact productivity”** and **“noise and distractions of the open plan office”** yet the lack of organisational acknowledgement of this.

“There’s an increasing emphasis on presenteeism, despite clear evidence people can be more productive at home”

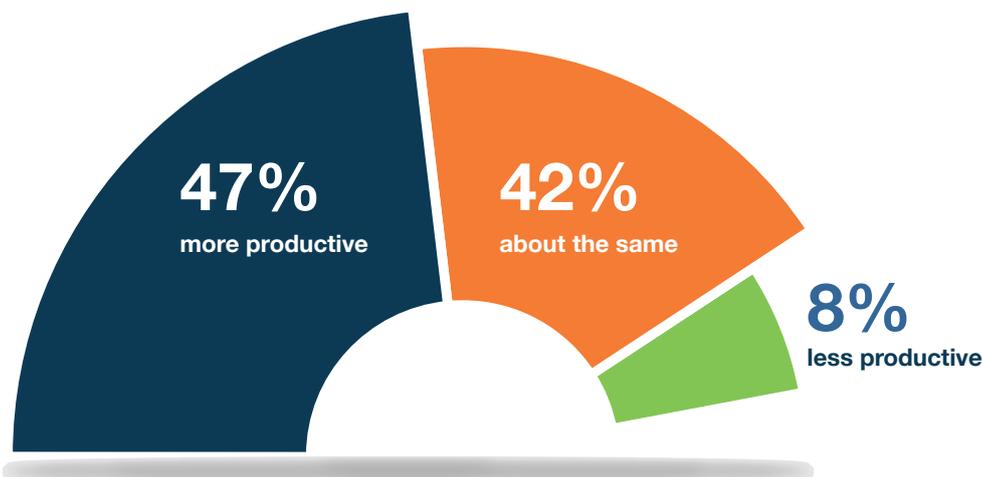
89%

felt just as productive when working at home compared to working in the office

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Ditch the context-free debate about working from home versus in the office. Focus instead on productive working environments and effective communication. Crucially, this should take into account the nature of the work being done. Solutions might include more quiet spaces in the office, informal collaboration areas, team days or half-days when everyone is in the office, reduced daily travel and shorter, fewer meetings.

“Lip service is paid to flexible working but there is a cultural feeling that working remotely is essentially taking a day off, despite clear evidence to the contrary”

How would you rate your levels of productivity when working from home / away from the office, compared to when you are in the office?



3. Defining productivity is key

Surprisingly, whilst many individuals feel flexible working is perceived by their employers to have a negative impact on productivity, the productivity question is rarely discussed or measured by firms, with some respondents highlighting that neither they nor their employer are clear on what being 'productive' actually means. Many individuals commented on the lack of a clear performance management framework that is relevant to their working pattern. 92% of flexible workers who responded said they would value having flexible performance targets; only 25% said their employers provided this already.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: It doesn't matter how much progress organisations make in terms of establishing a flexible and supportive culture if ultimately, employees are assessed against outdated performance management principles that focus on rewarding time spent in the office. Organisations need to re-consider what 'good' looks like and adjust their processes accordingly so as not to penalise flexible workers.

“We still track presence as a proxy for effort”

92%

of flexible workers said they would value having flexible performance targets

25%

said their employers provided this already

“The focus is on being 'seen' to be working in the right place, and instead of having honest conversations about work not being completed – or to a good enough standard – managers tend to hide behind the 'working at home' is not productive, when in fact the person is not being productive irrespective of where they are working”



4. Good technology and positive digital habits are equally vital

When it comes to managing workloads, 73% comment positively about technology being 'helpful'. Only 7% say it overwhelms them or negatively affects their wellbeing due to the blurring of boundaries with home life. 36% say they feel in control, and that technology helps them manage their time and workload positively. However another 37% say it's helpful but they find it hard to switch off from technology outside of work.

Are people slaves to work technology or do they have a healthy relationship with it? This is finely balanced, as voiced by this individual: **"It is both helpful and I feel overwhelmed by it sometimes"**. Many respondents mentioned implementing their own personal limitations on their use of technology, and proactively managing expectations of colleagues and managers, in order to maintain an acceptable boundary, improve their wellbeing and maintain focus on home life outside of working hours.

Having the right systems in place at work is critical. Many complain of inadequate technology being a huge drain on efficiency and productivity, and hampering attempts to work flexibly.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Get the right technology and tools in place to promote effective communication and ensure remote working can be supported appropriately. Encourage employees to exchange positive digital habits in using this technology, including discipline around switching off.

"Most of the time I do not check work emails when I'm not working/outside working hours. Since I stopped doing that, I have stopped dreaming constantly about work"

36%

feel in control; and that technology helps them manage their time and workload positively

"Poor systems means that dialling into meetings doesn't always work well. No discussions on how this can be fixed"

37%

find it hard to switch off from it outside of work.



5. City progression and development opportunities strongly favour those who 'fit the mould'

Our survey reveals that the City still prefers linear career paths which rarely cater for those with non-traditional working patterns or visible commitments at home. 43% of respondents say that progressing their career at their current employer would require unsustainable sacrifices in their personal lives.

Some clear successes are revealed in our survey, with mentoring programmes and networking opportunities both being valued highly by employees and regularly offered by their employers. However, issues are highlighted elsewhere with gaps emerging between what employees value and what their employers typically offer. For example, one to one coaching is important to over 90% of our respondents but only 38% tell us that their employer offers this support.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Conduct a career development audit to understand what support is valued by employees and create a mixed working group to develop solutions for unfilled needs.

Flexible working arrangements clearly pose a barrier to progression with 51% of respondents telling us that their employer does not include flexible workers in promotion or development opportunities, despite this being important to them. Some members still allude to progression/promotion decisions favouring full-time, male colleagues, highlighting ongoing additional challenges facing women working in the City. A substantial number comment on feeling trapped in their role as career progression has stalled and/or they fear they would be unable to get the same flexibility at a new employer. So they are effectively 'stuck' without prospect of development or advancement. This is retention minus the commitment and engagement.

"The route to promotion is partnership and continued promotion within the partnership and the requirements are the same for all candidates.

I am like Ginger Rogers [as compared to Fred Astaire] – I did everything he did but backwards and in high heels!"

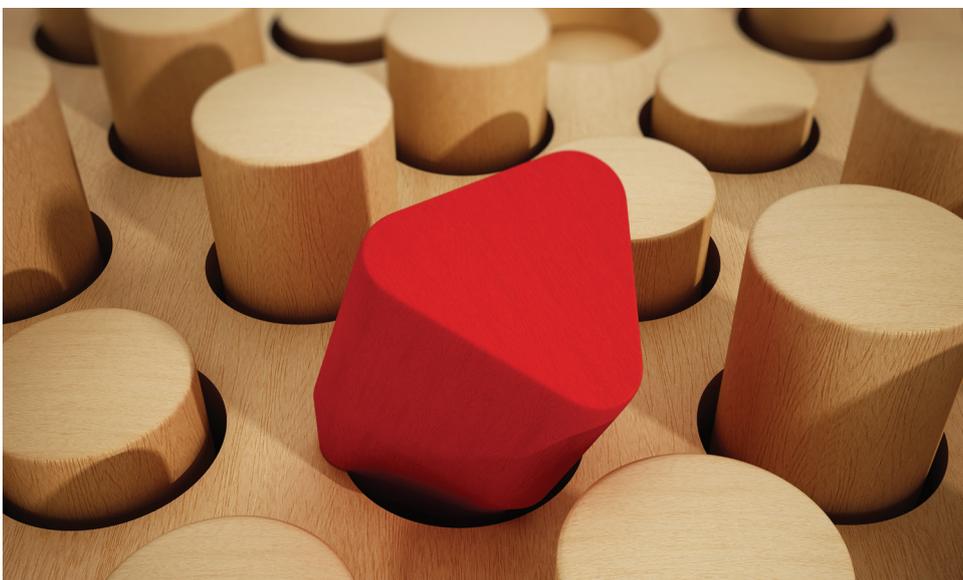
43%

say that progressing their career at their current employer would require unsustainable sacrifices in their personal lives

"It is difficult/impossible to get one day a week working from home in a new job in asset management and therefore I am trapped in my current job without any possibility of promotion as I'm the wrong sex"

51%

tell us that their employer does not include flexible workers in promotion or development opportunities.



6. Time and interesting work matter the most

Interesting work is the top reason (64%) why people stay at their employer, closely followed by work life balance and flexibility. Perhaps surprisingly, competitive pay and benefits come fourth.

Offering flexibility to employees in terms of working location and hours is a relatively easy win for employers looking to retain talent. The real challenge is to create interesting roles/work for them. People still want to do work they find stimulating and fulfilling, so taking a less skilled job is rarely the preferred solution for people in search of more flexibility.

A positive example is cited by this member: **“I personally have taken a new role on which is still within the same grade but gives me more exposure, variety and greater depth of knowledge”**.

Worryingly for employers, to improve their work/life balance more people (16%) would leave the City rather than consider an alternative City career path (6%) or take a pay cut in return for a less demanding job (6%).

To improve work/ life balance:

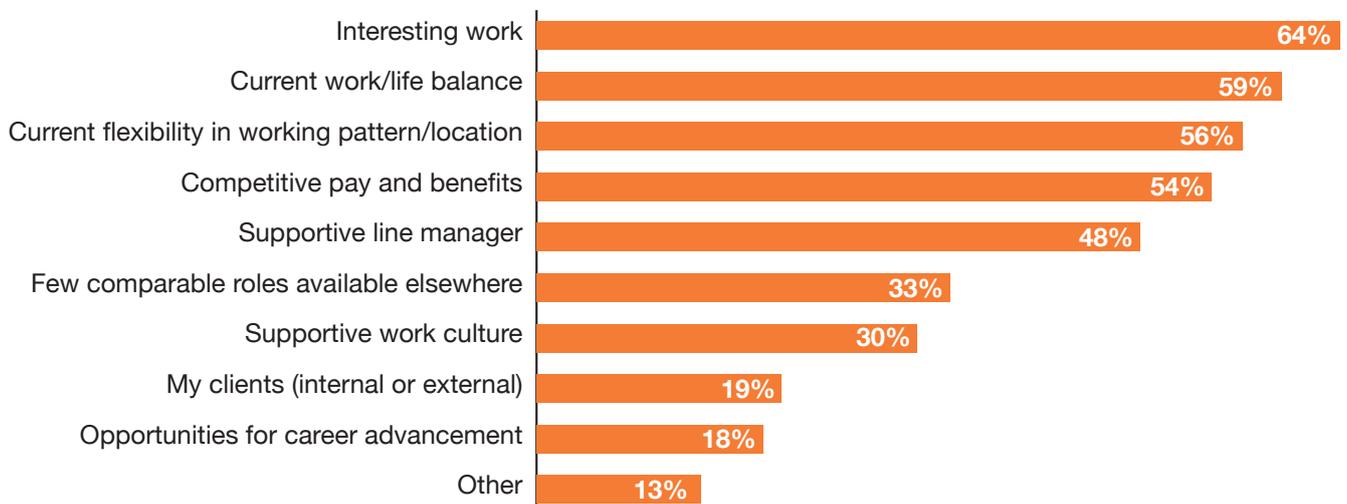
16%
would leave the City

6%
would consider an alternative career path

6%
would take a pay cut in return for a less demanding job

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Reassess resourcing processes so flexible workers don't miss out on the opportunity for interesting work. Look at opportunities to introduce hybrid roles, secondments and lateral moves where possible.

What makes you stay in your organisation?



7. Employees value career paths that can flex around different life stages

Cityparents members are generally united in a desire for a progressive rather than static career. Different stages in life allow for oscillating levels of engagement with work; looking after babies, caring for elderly parents, dealing with ill-health, divorce or bereavement, supporting teenagers through exam years. These life phases may all necessitate changing work intensity or working patterns for a time and individuals would welcome more employer recognition and support of this. But equally, weaving throughout are times of greater career focus, and our survey results demonstrate that individuals would find it helpful to be able to dial up and down their working intensity and flexible working arrangements to accommodate major life changes and events.

Over 93% of respondents confirm they value alternative pathways to progression. However, employers appear to be at best unaware, or at worst resistant, with only 27% of respondents indicating their employer supports this kind of approach. Further, while 54% say their employer is open to discussing the options and possibilities for alternative career paths, only 9% of respondents say their firm offers alternative routes of progression to the most senior jobs.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Allow your diverse workforce to flourish by recognising and rewarding skills, backgrounds, personal lives and working patterns. Offer greater variety in career paths, progression and development opportunities to allow individuals to change working intensity to suit different life stages.

“I requested an extra day working from home as now I’ve got my elderly father living with us as well as children. This was refused on the grounds I needed to be physically in the office and be seen to be in the office!”

Over **93%**

confirm they value alternative pathways to progression

“I’ve had my family and now want to work harder again... My (new) firm took a risk in me being able to raise my game and work in a v full on role again but they have been supportive and let me learn over a short period and I think it has paid off for all of us”



8. The City 'norm' is highly stressful and unsustainable

To date, professionals have understood that long hours and a demanding workload are simply required for a City career, recompensed by above-average rewards and the best career opportunities. But against a global backdrop of shifting attitudes to work/life and working cultures, the City increasingly risks being seen as failing to move with the times.

The impact of employer expectations of client service is clear. City businesses understandably strive to deliver the highest levels of client service, however in reality this often translates into an overarching need for employees to be available regardless of their working patterns and to deliver against deadlines at substantial personal cost. Organisations need to be clear with clients about their employees' working patterns and not be afraid to push back on unreasonable demands.

There is plenty of high-level talk about resilience and wellbeing but practical daily challenges of workload and resourcing are frequently being ignored – as one respondent remarked, **“it would be helpful to acknowledge there can just be too much work however resilient someone is”**. Whilst wellbeing in the workplace is increasingly acknowledged by organisations, significant stigma still remains preventing open conversations around mental health, and support is often superficial.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Sell the longer-term benefits to clients of a different resourcing/delivery model that delivers results yet respects different working patterns and is based on more efficient, sustainable ways of working.



“The inherent contradiction of the firm’s mental health initiatives yet the expectation (overt or not) to provide what is essentially full time client service 24x7”

“Mental health/work stress is not really being talked about at a lower team level. Company is promoting it over all, but it’s not discussed at the level where it really counts on a day to day basis”

“There is a lot of lip service paid to mental health initiatives at my firm, but in reality any sign of weakness/difficulty coping means the end of your career”

“We still don’t always talk to clients about the fact that some of our staff work differently”

Clearly, the price of such intense working environments is high for both employers and individuals. Concerns over heavy workloads and high stress levels were frequently cited in our survey. Whilst a minority may thrive on this in the short term, all recognise that this is not sustainable and brings negative consequences for the employer as much as the employee. Many comments were made about worsening relationships with colleagues and managers, and more mistakes being made at work as a result of these pressures.

Individuals repeatedly mention unmanageable stress, exhaustion, poor sleep and having no time to exercise or plan healthy meals. 53% rate their physical wellbeing as either 'excellent' or 'good' – a notable decline compared to 67% last year – whilst 56% responded the same for mental wellbeing. Close to half of respondents therefore believe their mental and physical wellbeing is either 'fair' or 'poor'.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Explicitly encourage people to create 'breathing spaces' during their working day for mental rest and/or physical exercise. If no-one at the top visibly does this or talks about it, no-one else will do it either.

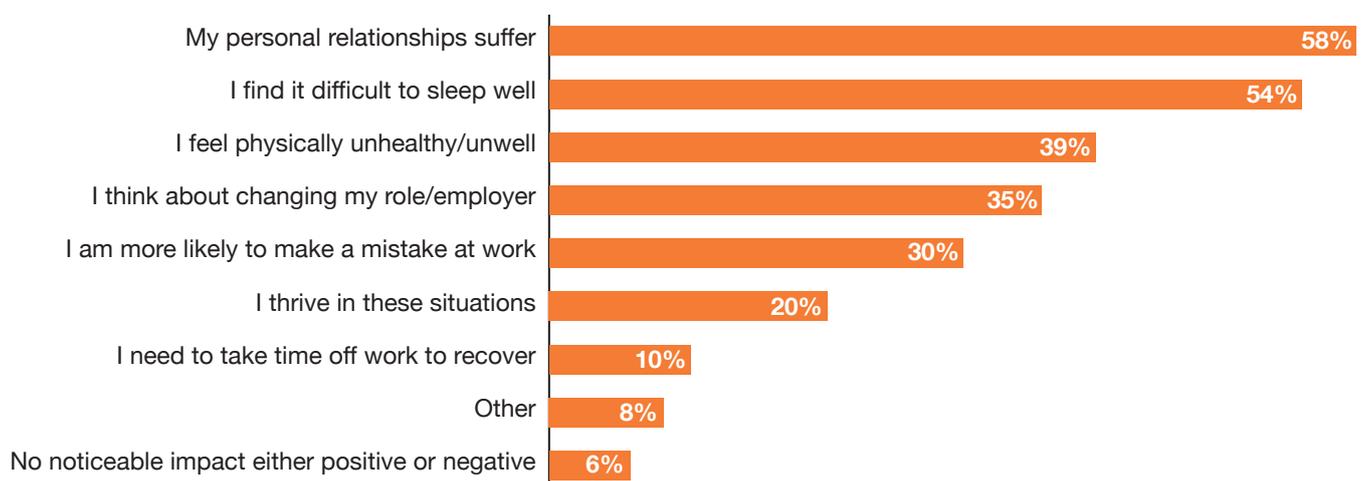
“I do enjoy being really busy and involved at work. However, this comes at a price; relationships and sleep”

44%

rate their mental wellbeing as only 'fair' or 'poor'

“Keeping all the plates spinning is nigh on impossible. I am concerned that the constant stress and demands of my job (and trying to balance this with being a parent) will have a long term negative impact on my children’s development and my own physical and mental health”

When your workload is at its heaviest and/or stress levels are at their highest, what impact does this have upon you?



Shifting the dial

Moving towards truly supportive workplace cultures is a difficult transition for many organisations. The dial is certainly shifting, but there is still a way to go. We have identified five key areas for focus; left unaddressed these will act as barriers to sustainable change but with proper attention they are powerful enablers.



Key enablers

1

Identify relatable role models

Employees can't find positive role models they relate to on a personal level, do not feel encouraged to seek flexible work or non-linear career paths

Employees see a diverse range of role models; senior people openly share their personal stories and different working arrangements are shared as successes

2

Increase understanding of new ways of working

Old-fashioned mindsets create mistrust; employees need to 'fit the mould' and work conventionally in order to progress

Emphasis on productivity means employees feel able to consider alternative working patterns without detriment to their career; diversity is valued

3

Provide appropriate technology and implement boundaries

Employees may not have the right tools to work flexibly and productively. Or, employees feel an expectation to always be available

Technology supporting working outside the office is available to all, employees are disciplined in its use and boundaries are respected

4

Update performance management processes

'Good' is defined by hours worked, performance processes are not fairly adjusted for flexible workers, therefore these employees appear not to 'perform' as well as full-time colleagues

Performance targets measure output and productivity rather than number of hours worked; no stigma attached to alternative working patterns

5

Be bold in trialling new resourcing models

Work is allocated on 100% availability and client demands mean flexible workers miss out on interesting work

Work allocation is not constrained by notion of 'full-time' and the employer is confident in pushing back on client demands where this doesn't match their own ethos