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

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References

For all references please refer to Working Paper References on the Gender Worx website.



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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About Insync Surveys

Insync Surveys has one of the largest suites of leading edge integrated benchmarked stakeholder surveys in the world. Its surveys are distributed in over 30 countries and in over 15 languages and include surveys for employees, customers, boards, community groups and many other organisation stakeholders.

Insync Surveys has carried out surveys for some of the largest public, private, government and not-for-profit organisations in Asia Pacific. It is based in Australia and has representatives in New Zealand, Asia, UK and North America. Insync Surveys' technology also powers the surveys of Board Benchmarking and Gender Worx.

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