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## UPDATE: AUTUMN 2005

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**R**elatively few managers of flexible workers have ever received management training specifically for this type of context according to a recent report by the Future Work Forum at Henley Management College.

Managers generally feel it's harder to manage in a flexible working environment, with key concerns centred around fears of losing control, the difficulty in building and maintaining team unity and of communications being interrupted because of problems with technology.

A separate study carried out by the campaigning body Common Purpose found a deficit of courage among managers. The most challenging situations they face involve stepping out of their comfort zone, particularly when dealing with people they need to influence.

Avoidance is the typical response, as managers feel ill-equipped to tackle situations which require them to influence, motivate or instruct others - whether colleagues, suppliers, investors or customers.

Little wonder that organisations typically cite managers as being a major obstacle in their attempts to implement more flexible working arrangements!

### Supporting managers - Our top tips:

- **Emphasise the need for effective team building.**

Managers often make the mistaken assumption that a group of people working together equates to a team, but - as management guru Dave Ulrich points out - it's possible to have five world-class basketball players without having a world-class basketball team!

- **Encourage communication.**

Satisfactory flexible working arrangements are the outcome of positive negotiations between team members and their manager. Make sure that procedures and guidelines are clear and easy to follow and encourage a win-win approach. Staff need to be assertive, and managers responsive.

- **Build a database of in-house experience.**

Encourage managers to share issues and solutions via a facilitated network or an intranet. Foster a climate of manager to manager coaching.

*For more tips on how HR can support managers of flexible workers and encourage greater flexibility, send us an email with the words 'supporting managers' in the subject line.*

### Work-Life Balance - a life-course perspective

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has recently completed a project looking at: 'A new organisation of time over working life'. Its purpose was to explore how adopting a 'life-course' perspective might enable workers to organise time in a way which meets both their own needs and those of their employer.

Grounded in developmental psychology, the idea has been around for some time. Charles Handy was advocating a similar approach in his writing during the 1990s. As the general trend for working lives continues to move from continuity and security to greater flexibility and insecurity, adopting a life-course approach becomes increasingly appropriate.

We have always believed the only sustainable way to manage work-life balance is to recognise its dynamic and changing nature which brings changing demands as people progress through their lives.

Our new **Work-life Balance Workshops for Individuals** are based on this model; and have been well received by participants - who tell us they are "thought provoking".

## Father friendly workplaces

We know the term 'family friendly' is generally interpreted by men and women alike to mean 'mother friendly' so it was refreshing to learn this summer that employers are genuinely attempting to be more 'father friendly'.

Our recent benchmarking research into provisions among a range of medium to large employers in the private sector revealed the majority are taking steps to support new fathers in the workplace.

- Most have introduced at least one week's paternity leave at full contractual pay.
- Several are working with specialist bodies such as Fathers Direct or Employers for Fathers to develop information and support services specifically aimed at men.
- And a few encourage fathers to attend ante-natal appointments (in line with the DTI's good practice guidelines published last year).

Given that recent CIPD research revealed the traditional 'macho culture' still operating in many workplaces is one of the biggest barriers to fathers taking Paternity Leave, these initiatives are to be applauded.

*HalsAllan regularly carries out benchmarking exercises into work-life balance issues on behalf of clients wanting to position themselves more competitively as Employers of Choice. Send us an email for more information.*

## Improving People Management in the Social Care sector

Over the summer we've also been involved in writing content for and helping launch a new website designed to help social care providers review and improve their human resource policies and practices.

Funded and hosted by the Social Care Institute for Excellence this comprehensive site is free to access and covers the whole range of HR issues employers – whatever their size – are likely to face.

The next step is to establish an HR network to share ideas and information; and to influence the further development of the site. If you work in the social care sector, we'd like to encourage you to take a look:

[www.scie-peoplemanagement.org.uk](http://www.scie-peoplemanagement.org.uk)

## Fit and Fifty?

...is the title of a recent report published by the ESRC looking at the lifestyle of the 50+ generation.

While the numbers of people in their 50s will increase over the next 10 years, full-time employment levels for men in the 50-59 age group fell dramatically in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (from 93% in the 1970s to 75% in 1996).

According to the report, men and women in their 50s hold similar attitudes towards the family, gender roles, the economy and the welfare state to those of people in their 30s, and 40s. Furthermore, outright home ownership among the 50s age group is higher than for younger age groups, making them potentially much more stable employees.

Given these facts, the high unemployment levels among people of 50+ represent a shocking waste of human resources in a tight labour market.

## Facilitating flexibility through training:

HalsAllan works with clients to develop and implement sustainable working practices based on flexible working arrangements and harnessing technology in positive ways.

In addition to providing specialist consultancy advice and support, we offer an established portfolio of strategic flexible working, diversity and work-life balance workshops.

Our final open workshops this year will run in Central London on 24<sup>th</sup> November:

**Building HR Strategy around Work-Life Balance** is aimed at senior HR practitioners and other key decision makers concerned with developing a coherent HR strategy to support an organisational culture of respect for work-life balance and diversity.

**The Work-life Balance Workshop for Individuals** is based around the ideas raised in the Eurofound report discussed earlier.

These two half-day workshops can be combined to provide delegates with a strategic framework and a 'taster' of operational training for staff.

Details of our full portfolio of workshops - all of which can be tailored for presentation in-house - can be found on our website.