

UPDATE: SPRING 2006

Our newsletter contains updates on topical issues relevant to sustainable working practices, and is published quarterly. Back copies are available on our website. To join our mailing list, email us with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject box.

The continuing shortage of part-time and flexible jobs at senior levels is one of the biggest reasons for the under-utilisation of women's workplace skills, according to the Women & Work Commission's recent report - Shaping a Fairer Future.

It's not just mothers who pay a financial penalty for combining work with childcare. The report suggests the economy could be between £2 billion and £9 billion better off if their skills were fully utilised.

The Commission looked at how to eradicate disparities between men's and women's earnings in a generation. Their report reiterates the need to challenge cultural assumptions about the types of jobs men and women do. Girls need a better understanding of the working world – in particular the consequences of choosing traditionally female occupations.

Better training opportunities and wider access to quality part-time work are also called for. Only 7% of managers and senior officials work part-time compared with 33% of those in administrative and secretarial occupations.

Encouraging flexible hours at senior levels:

- Find out who is already working flexibly and publicise it

Chances are, some senior people are working flexibly, but keeping it quiet. Sharing their experience around the organisation will not only encourage others to request flexible arrangements, but also add to the knowledge about how to make such arrangements work.

- Review your performance management system and promotion criteria

Flexible arrangements work on trust – that employees will deliver. Managers and staff need to know exactly what's to be delivered and when. Focusing on outputs rather than time spent in the office is the first step to re-organising work. And staff need to be appraised and promoted on what they've achieved, rather than how they got there.

- Not all jobs can be shared

although in our view most can be worked more flexibly. While job-share is the most immediate choice for flexibility at senior levels, other arrangements, such as job-splits or compressed working may be more appropriate.

Find more information about flexible working at senior levels on our website, or email us.

HalsAllan Director Anna Allan has been a long-term advocate of better opportunities for part-time work. It was her belief that women should not be penalised for combining work and caring responsibilities, and that there were positive benefits to employers in encouraging flexibility, which spurred her to develop the CIPD book "Part-Time Workers" (ISBN 0-85292-813-0) back in 1999.

Anna was also a trustee of the charity New Ways to Work when Pam Walton researched and developed the report "Flexi-Exec: Working Flexibly at senior and managerial levels" This excellent publication remains a relevant, valuable guide for employers. Copies can be purchased from Jonathan Swan at the charity Working Families (020 7253 7243).

Mothers take the lead in changing work

We're delighted to learn a new generation of working mums is taking steps to change workplace cultures. We've recently come across a spate of excellent websites supporting working parents. Whether you're a working parent struggling with life-balance issues; or an employer wishing to harness the talents of parents more fully, take a look at the following sites:

www.justparttime.co.uk

www.motheratwork.co.uk

www.mumandworking.co.uk

www.workingmums.co.uk

Women's ambitions are stifled by a lack of recognition

of their achievements according to a fascinating article by psychiatrist Anna Fels (Harvard Business Review April 2004). From an early age girls receive less recognition for their accomplishments than men do. Recognition is an essential motivator for acquiring expertise, girls quickly learn that in order to be seen as feminine they should relinquish it to others, typically men.

Femininity, Fels suggests, is defined in the context of a relationship. From this follows the tenet that a woman must be providing something for another person – a lover, child, sick parent, husband or even a boss. Giving is the chief activity that defines femininity.

"This may help explain why professional women are credited with being highly supportive managers and excellent team players.

Job-share or just plain indispensable?

Just before the publication of the Women & Work Commission's report the Guardian (4th March) asked a range of senior people whether their jobs could be shared.

It was no surprise to us that the only one of the six said who said no was Ms Ruth Lea. If job-share won't work, Ruth, perhaps job-split might?

Or perhaps it's more a case of 'not wanted at present'. In our experience the strongest motivator for developing flexible working arrangements at senior levels is enlightened self-interest. If Ms Lea should ever find herself struggling to balance work and outside responsibilities, it's very likely her view of how flexibly her job could be worked will change!

By focusing their energy on these aspects of work life, women can be both businesslike and feminine." She suggests.

(It may also explain why, in our work, we frequently hear stories of fathers asking for time off for childcare, only to be met with the response: "Can't your wife deal with it?")

It is because of these expectations, Fels maintains, that women now experience the most powerful social and institutional discrimination during their twenties and early thirties – just around the time when they're most likely to marry and have children.

An interesting thing happens in later life, however. Freed from the ties of bringing up children and having fulfilled the 'feminine role' expected of them, women acquire a new energy and new focus on work.

This was also the conclusion

of an article in the March 2006 issue of Director magazine. 'Baby boomer' entrepreneurs now account for 54% of the UK's self-employed. While some of this may be a result of age discrimination, the number one priority of the forty-something women interviewed was expressing who they were. Having grown in confidence they wanted to do something for themselves, perhaps because they hadn't put themselves first before.

The article profiled three women who launched multimillion pound companies in their forties. All said they wouldn't have had the knowledge and experience necessary for running large-scale businesses in their twenties and thirties.

Perhaps this is another compelling reason for organisations to work at retaining their female talent?

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.

For employers wanting to offer greater access to flexible working arrangements, we're offering the following open workshops in 2006:

Attracting and recruiting the flexible workforce is a practical one-day workshop which equips recruiters with the skills to develop recruitment & selection strategies linked to flexible working and equality policies.

Restructuring for better balance is a half day workshop developing skills for re-designing your workplace to take advantage of new and sustainable ways of working.

Work-life balance and HR strategy is a half-day briefing to guide participants through the process of integrating work-life balance programmes and HR strategy in support of 21st century working practices.

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

And finally.....take a look at: www.workwiseuk.org for information about Work Wise week – 3-9 May aimed at encouraging smarter working practices.