

FLEXIBLE WORKING

THE EMPLOYEE REALITY



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INTRODUCTION

On the 30th June 2014, the Government extended the Flexible Working Policy to all employees under section 47 of the Employment Act 2002.

While this adjustment in statutory rights was deemed to many as an evolution in the workplace, there has been little inquiry as to the number of employers which have embraced the policy; with no full Government review or independent commission as to the number of organisations actioning the policy.

Furthermore, the Flexible Working Policy itself is somewhat weak in its support for employees; employers have the right to refuse any flexible working request on subjective grounds, such as the burden of additional costs on the business, or having a detrimental effect on the ability to meet customer demand.

It appears that the Flexible Working Policy can be seen as more of a goodwill gesture to employees, rather than a cornerstone in evolving the workplace.

The Flexible Working Policy may be in place, but that doesn't mean it is actioned or supported in all organisations.

As detailed in this review, the employee reality of flexible working is far from what many would like us to believe.



Therefore, The Employee Reality survey conducted by Liberty Mind was created to fully understand the impacts on people who do not have access to flexible working, and how their lives have been affected by the restrictions of rigid working hours.

Throughout this whitepaper, we will identify the significant data that has been revealed by this survey, and look at what organisations need to do if they are to become an agile working environment that is future proof.

Flexible working is the future, it does not need to be limited by sector, role or industry.

If businesses cannot find a way to adopt such policies and fully support their employees, they may find recruitment difficult, and see a severe drop in skilled talent.

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted for this whitepaper is original data collected by Liberty Mind from 2,000 full-time UK employees, aged between 20-55.

A survey was used for this research to enable Liberty Mind to find original data which would reveal the impacts rigid working hours and the lack of flexible working on employees lives.

The term 'life event' throughout this paper, is defined as;

Any major change in a person's circumstances included but not restricted to; divorce, death, illness, moving house, having a child. A situation that affects interpersonal relationships and recreational activities.

The data found from the survey has informed this whitepaper and has provided Liberty Mind with a unique insight into the life-restricting environment that many employees face in today's workplace.

KEY FINDINGS

LIFE EVENTS



67% of employees have **missed out on a major life event** due to the lack of flexible working



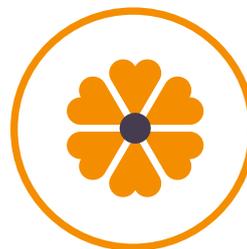
40% of employees have **missed hospital or health-related appointments**



15% of employees have missed out on their **moving house day**



10% of employees have missed a **child's school activity**



8% of employees have missed a **family funeral**



83% of employees have been made to feel guilty by their employers for taking time off for a major life event

KEY FINDINGS

FLEXIBLE HOPES



79% of employees feel **held back in life** due to the lack of flexible working



44% of employees say that flexible working would help them to **feel less stressed**



13% of employees say that flexible working would help them to **care for a loved one**



17% of employees say that flexible working would give them the opportunity to **have a hobby**

EMOTIONAL BLACKMAIL



74% of employees have been made to feel guilty for taking time off for being ill



83% of employees have been made to feel guilty for taking time off for a major life event

A SEPARATION OF WORK AND LIFE

The traditional 9-5 that many organisations adhere to is **deeply limiting to our human potential**.

In the Employee Reality Survey, **67% of employees revealed that they have missed out on major life events** due to the lack of flexible working within their organisation.

This statistic shows us that we have not yet established organisations that can fully support people in every aspect of their lives.

The term '**work-life balance**' itself, shows just how much we have separated life from work, and that when employees enter into these environments, their authentic selves are left at the door, and they must work like a cog in a wheel. **Organisations still see people as a 'resource' to be used and discarded.**

Life matters, but as a society, and to many businesses, **it is seen as an acceptable notion to separate the two.**

According to the Organization of Economic Development, **the UK currently ranks 29th in the work-life balance index.**

It is no wonder then, that across organisations we see a deep lack in motivation and productivity, that provides leaders with ammunition to prevent flexible working.

Managers can easily insist that flexible working is not possible, making a request feel futile, and a challenge feel unreasonable.

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A SEPARATION OF WORK AND LIFE

When surveyed, respondents **revealed the vast array of major life events** that had been missed because employers could not provide flexible working.

A staggering **40% of employees had missed hospital or health-related appointments** that were significant to their overall health.

15% of employees revealed that they have missed moving house, 10% have missed a child related activity, and 8% have missed a family funeral.

When the Flexible Working Policy was introduced it may have seemed like we were finally creating working environments where **we were 'allowed' to have a life**, but as detailed in this data, the reality is far from the perceived hopes.

10% of employees have missed a child related activity due to a lack of flexible working hours

15% of employees revealed that they have missed moving house due to lack of flexible working hours

40% of employees have missed hospital or health-related appointments due to lack of flexible working hours

THE EMOTIONAL PARADIGM

Many studies have continued to support the benefits that flexible working can provide to both organisations and employees, but few look at the **emotional impact that flexible working has on employees**.

As humans, we are emotional beings, we have thoughts and feelings, and these should be considered in the flexible working landscape.

It is a **moral disgrace** that we have allowed ourselves to create organisations that force people to feel like they **cannot have a life outside of work**.

The Employee Reality survey shows us that there is still much more work to be done to help us get over this divide, as **83% of respondents revealed they had been made to feel guilty by their employer for taking time off work for a major life event**.

This shows us that even with flexible working in place, organisations are playing on the emotions of employees to make them feel that **work takes a priority over life**.

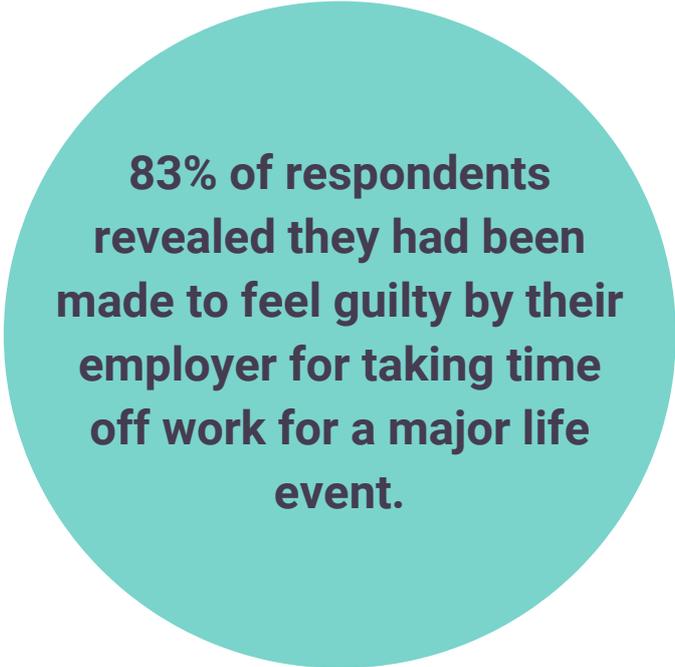
To employees in an organisation this signals that we are somehow **removed from normal life when we are at work**; which is a where we rent out our labour for a few hours, but not a place that we can invest in.

Diving further into this emotional blackmail executed by organisations, 74% of employees have been made to **feel guilty for taking time off for being ill**.

Considering that 47% of employees didn't take a sick day in 2017 according to research from Canada Group, it's clear that within the UK we have a **serious issue** with providing and support and care to employees during ill-health.

Not only are organisations removing flexibility that can offer employees a more fulfilling life, but they are pushing the **emotional buttons** to prevent employees from getting the rest and support needed even in poor health.

Flexible work can be the antidote to many of these areas, yet organisations fear it.



83% of respondents revealed they had been made to feel guilty by their employer for taking time off work for a major life event.

A WELLBEING FACTOR

The relationships that we have in our lives play a significant part in our **mental and emotional wellbeing**.

Yet, as revealed in The Employee Reality survey, employees are left feeling guilty about attending major **life events that can be critical in building strong, healthy relationships**.

As humans, we have an inherent desire to be close to others. To build relationships and connect with people. It is part of our survival as a species.

When we feel disconnected from others, we begin to feel isolated, **depressed** and anxious.

Relationships not only make us happy, but they influence our **long-term health**. Enabling us to get enough rest, eat well and feel less stressed.

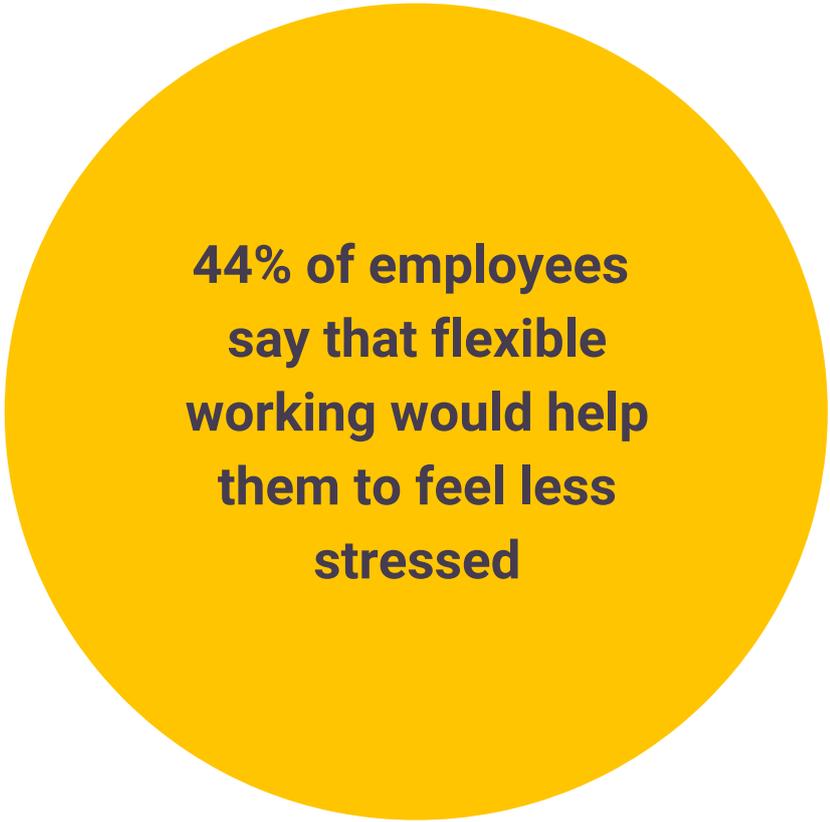
In Harvard's longest study on happiness, it was found that even when we are in poor health, pain is felt less when we are being cared for by a loved one.

If relationships have such a critical impact on our wellbeing, why are we creating organisations that are limiting them?

When asked about the how flexible working would impact their lives, 44% of respondents in The Employee Reality survey said that flexible working would help them to **feel less stressed**.

While 13% said it would enable them to care for a loved one, and 17% said that flexible working would give them the opportunity to have a hobby.

Whether we are seeking to bond with our family and friends or give ourselves more time to enjoy fulfilling activities, flexible working needs to be seen as a life-essential policy for our human wellbeing, rather than just an optional extra.



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AN OUTDATED 9-5 MINDSET

“Eight hours labour, eight hours recreation, eight hours rest”. These are the famous words of **British factory owner Robert Owen who in 1817 began the 40-hour work week.**

These words were revolutionary in the 1800's, yet here we are in 2018, and still working to hours that were set for factory labourers.

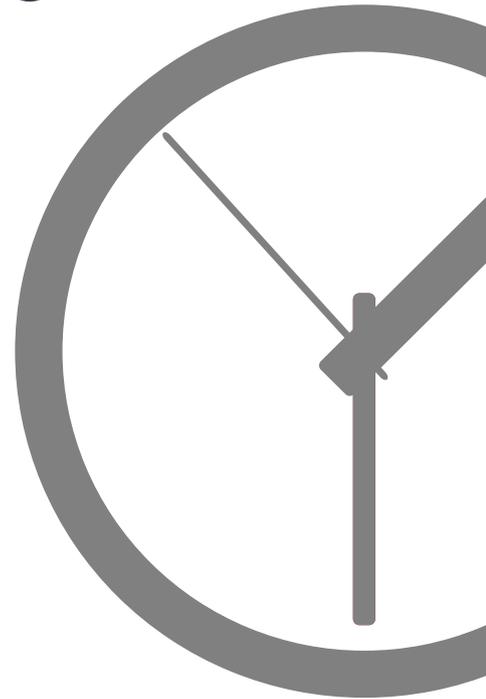
At present, we are conforming to what has been done in the past; but that doesn't mean it's the right way to do things. As author Douglas Coupland has said, **“I think one day we're doing to look back at 9 to 5 and we're going to think about it in the way we currently do about child labour in the 19th century.”**

Your employees may be sat in your office, but that doesn't necessarily mean they are working to their full potential or feeling well about the way they are working.

The **'presence based work'** we have become accustomed to across the UK, is an archaic mindset that has us believe that if we are not in an office for eight hours, we cannot possibly be doing our best work. **But do we need exactly 8 hours to accomplish work?**

In many instances we are compelled to fill our time rather than be the most productive with it.

The avoidance of finding a flexible working approach in any organisation is not because flexible working doesn't work for all industries; it is because leaders are not passionate enough about finding a solution that works for their people and their business.



AN OUTDATED 9-5 MINDSET

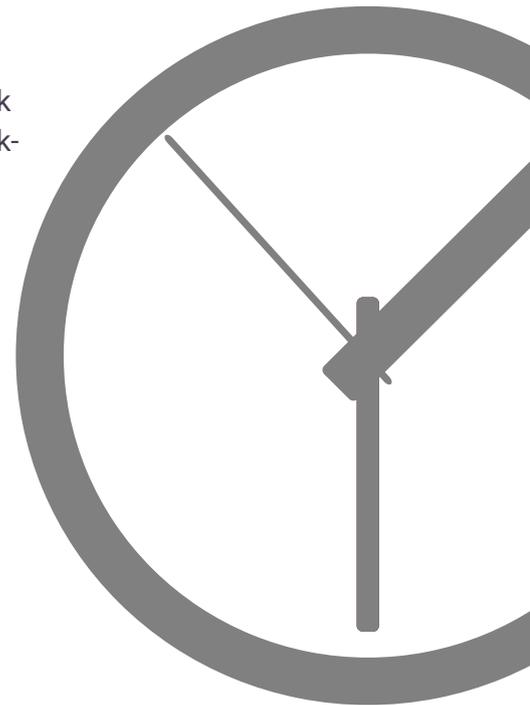
Too often it falls to employees to be the martyrs, and push for even a fraction of flexibility, or do the last resort option and find a new organisation that is more forward-thinking.

“We must learn to speak-up about important events in our lives, and stop pretending that work will always trump all other circumstances.”
- Frederic Laloux

If organisations truly believe that 9-5 is the only option, they are at risk of losing themselves to an agile future, where their company will be obsolete. It's an adapt or die situation, that cannot be avoided.

In The Employee Reality survey, it was found that 87% of employees have considered changing jobs because their current employer does not offer flexible working.

The ability to be able to combine both work and life simultaneously is no longer a 'work-perk', but an obligatory right that everyone should be able to embrace.



CONCLUSION

The employee reality of flexible working is not as positive as the media or the UK Government would like us all to believe.

As revealed in this review, employees without the opportunity of flexible working feel their lives are restricted, and for employees who utilise the policy, they often gain emotional blackmail that they are putting life before work and putting the organisation into turmoil.

This combination of restriction and emotional conflict means that the lack of flexible working in all capacities has a tremendous effect on our lives. Crushing opportunities to be part of major life events, stifling personal growth, and damaging our mental wellbeing.

Since its introduction in 2014, we have seen slow progress in the adoption of the Flexible Working Policy across organisations, and now we can see that this lack of strong support is also affecting not only our working lives but our entire lives as a whole.



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