



Navigating reduced hours careers: Experiences of male and female executives and senior managers

Professor Sue Durbin & Stella Warren,
University of the West of England, Bristol
Professor Jennifer Tomlinson,
University of Leeds, UK

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Welcome and introduction

- An under-researched area: the extent to which elite workers (senior managers and executives) who are often associated with traditional ways of working and long full time hours, are able to work reduced hours and navigate their careers, remain visible and lead.
- We also examined the shift towards remote working for managers and offer early insights into how senior managers adapted to working from home pre and during the pandemic and their thoughts on the future of hybrid working.

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Context

Through focusing exclusively upon executives and senior managers, the broader project explored:

- The experiences of organisational leaders who have reduced hours and the strategies they employ to manage a demanding position requiring leadership and visibility while working reduced hours
- The impact of working from home, due to the pandemic, on themselves and their colleagues
- Their prospects for the future

Overview

Today's presentation focuses upon:

Senior managers and executives working reduced hours *and* working from home (WFH)

WFH pre-pandemic

WFH during pandemic (2020)

Recognising challenges for others WFH

The future of WFH for reduced hours managers

The pandemic has placed the spotlight upon WFH but we know very little about those WFH who work reduced hours



Navigating reduced hours

Background to the
study

The quality of part time work

- According to Timewise (2021) just 3% of jobs paying £80K+ are advertised on RH basis, compared with 19% at £20K
- Homeworking advertised jobs most prevalent for high earners (14%) compared with the low earners (3%) (Timewise, 2021)
- PT work is 'career limiting' (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010; Crompton and Lyonette, 2011)
- More pronounced for managerial than professional occupations. LFS data confirms few managerial jobs exist on a PT basis (9.6%) compared to professional jobs -16.8% (ONS, 2018).
- The distribution of PT jobs is dominated by low skills jobs - we see the 5 Cs accounting for 70% PT jobs (ONS, 2018)
- More recently, evidence that there are both embracing and ambivalent organisations in relation to innovations in reduced hour/flex work (Kossek et al., 2015)
- Just 30% of fathers believe reducing hours is an available option compared with 10% of women, especially those in lower status occupations/private sector (Cook et al., 2021)

Reduced hours & part-time management jobs

- Growing body of scholarship in more recent years (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2018; Kossek et al., 2015; Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018; Young, 2018)
- Greater interest in the four day working week in media, professional press as well as academic debate (eg Spencer, 2021; [Mayne, 2022](#)) but very little on job share
- Beham et al. (2020) argue that flexible working is not viable for part-time managers with families on the career track as this violates norms of availability and commitment. There is a need for temporal flexibility around schedules and working hours, demanded by the firm

Female part-time managers' experiences of work

- Our previous work focused on the experiences of **female part-time managers**. Key findings:
- Women were career focused, highly educated/skilled and seeking a reduction in hours to maintain a career they were committed to
- Most worked FT for same employer before reducing hours.
- They were proactive in thinking about how their reduced hours would work alongside organisational objectives
- Success stories involved **flexibility** on both sides, a **supportive mentor, sponsor or line manager & supportive practices at the workplace level** (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010; 2014).

Female part-time managers' experiences of work (2010)

Less favourable accounts and experiences related to one or more of the following issues:

1. Lack of reallocation of work or resource planning following a reduction in working hours – effectively some women were doing a FT job in PT hours with PT pay.
2. Changes to job content - being taken off prestigious projects or having important clients reassigned
3. Perceived lack of future prospects while PT
4. Lack of visible senior role models (male/female) working PT
5. Lack of external jobs advertised PT

More optimistic accounts of reduced hours? – the new study (2020)

- **New study: men and women (35) working reduced hours in senior management and executive roles**
- More optimism – job content remains the same/similar, and general perception reduced hours is more commonplace
- More visible role models, and sense of career maintenance
- Those working reduced hours very positive about their ability to manage teams, their overall WLB and career sustainability
- Key to making arrangements work:
 1. **Trust and delegation within team**
 2. **Solid, convincing business case**
 3. **Being flexible (on days off, being responsive)**

Challenges yet to be resolved

However, most participants **raised issues with workload and working time expectations** and a significant minority, **equity in pay**

	Worked regularly beyond contract hours	Worked regularly/flexibly on allocated day off	Raised concerns about pay equity
Yes	21	20	12
No (not applicable)	10 (4)	11 (4)	20 (3)

Context: the Covid-19 Pandemic & flexible working

- According to Timewise (2021)
 - Proportion of jobs advertised with flexible working pre-pandemic peaked to 17% & rose to 26% during the pandemic
 - Job adverts offering part-time working rose from 8% at beginning of pandemic to 10% during the pandemic
 - WFH is widespread but employers are not advertising jobs as such and this means they are 'missing a trick'
- But, according to Timewise 'Fair Flexible Futures' report (2021):
 - during pandemic, rates of PT employment fell to lowest levels since 2010 – in 2020, share of women in PT work fell from 41% to 37%
 - PTs more likely to have been furloughed than FT workers

The future of hybrid working/WFH....?

- Hybrid working/WFH:
 - employers told to prepare for on-going WFH, by government SAGE committee. Could lead to a divided workforce as not all (e.g. frontline workers) can WFH (CIPD, People Management, 2021)
 - Half of workers would consider changing roles if hybrid working was withdrawn (CIPD, citing You Gov Survey of 2000 workers (CIPD, People Management, December, 2021)
 - More hybrid employers (41%) report increased productivity and 39% of employees want to work at home most or all of the time (CIPD, 2022)
 - Half of professionals want to continue remote working as a permanent feature (especially younger workers, aged 16-24) (CIPD, 2021)

What are the implications?

Issues with WFH for many....

- Women who WFH will hurt their careers (stalled careers for women who are more likely to WFH than men) and employers are favouring office-based workers, resulting in a two track approach
- Women are losing out on the informal interactions (watercooler conversations) that are not available virtually (Catherine Mann, Bank of England, November, 2021)
- Those 'on-boarded' remotely found it harder to be part of company culture and to build workplace relationships (CIPD, citing You Gov Survey of 2000 workers (CIPD, People Management, December, 2021)
- Labour force participation for ethnic minority groups reduced or stalled by mid-2020 and there are now 1.5M more men than women employed, the largest gap since records began (CIPD citing ONS Survey, Q2, 2021)
- Quarter of survey respondents concerned about being treated unfavourably due to WFH/hybrid working (CIPD, 2022)

Academic studies concur there are implications...

We await studies on reduced hours working and the pandemic but so far we have studies with a focus upon:

- Gender roles, WFH and remote working
 - Enforced WFH during pandemic – potential for conflict between remote working and work-life family balance, with women more likely than men to experience greater tensions and blurring of boundaries – questions whether WFH gives individuals more control and choices, especially women (Anderson et al. 2020) **UK**
 - Newly enforced flexible working turns WFH and WLB into a ‘never ending shift’ for women – pervasive, constant working that requires higher performativity (Boncari et al. 2020) **UK**
 - Chung et al. (2021 and 2020) – men taking on more domestic roles but not as much as women so remain inequitable; mothers struggling to find space and time; mental health challenges (e.g. more worry), despite men taking more of a share of the domestic and childcare responsibilities **UK**

Academic studies continued....

- A similar story in other countries, for example:
 - Dual earner parent couples impact of pandemic on working hours and domestic labour – both mothers and fathers increased unpaid domestic labour but mothers more so than men (Craig and Churchill, 2020)
Australia
 - Negative impact of WFH for women with domestic labour responsibilities. Negative impacts when coupled with paid work, especially on their mental and emotional health (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021)
Iceland
- A study comparing full-time and part-time workers from **Norway** found that PT workers had a higher chance of income loss and a lower chance of WFH than full-time workers. They were also more likely than FT workers to have their hours reduced further

Sample overview

35 interviews

March-November
2020

Demographics

Gender:

Female

Male



26



9

Age range:

35-62

Ethnicity:

White British

Married/living
with a partner:

30

Dependent
children:

28

Job sectors

- Commercial/retail bank
- Local Government
- Transport
- Hospital Trust
- Law Firms
- Manufacturing
- Pharmaceuticals
- Social Enterprise
- Professional services

Working time- patterns & Salary

35 participants

- 4 x 0.9 FTE
- 18 x 0.8 FTE (1 job share)
- 12 x 0.6-0.7 FTE (7 job share)

Salary range (31/35 disclosed salary)

- £47.5k - £250k (plus benefits)
- Salary average £103.6k

Navigating reduced hours: Working from home

WFH Pre and During Covid-19 Pandemic

WFH Pre-pandemic

- Those earning £80K+ are the most likely have a role advertised that accommodates WFH (Timewise, 2021)
- In line with this, WFH for part of the week was a widespread practice for all interviewees (for most, one to two days per week)
- Based upon both formal and informal arrangements with line managers
- Visibility was the main concern for these managers who ensured some time was spent in the office
- Strategies to manage visibility were either 'not advertising' that they were working reduced hours or WFH but most were more 'upfront' about it
- WFH worked for most, but this was not without its challenges for some

Not advertising WFH

“

I think it was ok, I didn't particularly highlight when I wasn't in the office. Which some people do um I think I probably let things rack up on my phone and check them at lunchtime when [child] was asleep um so in terms of client visibility it definitely wasn't visible, I would say probably generally I didn't highlight that I wasn't going to be there. I just tried to manage it which is probably not ideal.

(Female, Director, Law Firm)

I didn't want to draw attention to it I guess, not shying away from it. I'm happy to tell people but not drawing attention to every man and his dog who sends me an email when I'm off, being notified that I work part-time. That felt like a step too far for me even though it shouldn't be, but it just did. *(Male, Head of Department, Social Enterprise)*

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Maintaining visibility

Two interviewees in a job share managed visibility by ensuring one of them was always visible and available and by pro-actively seeking out new opportunities:

“ So, we work on that quite a lot so that’s kind of hunting down things that you can do, projects you can do, calls you can be on and making sure that we split the visibility. Because there’s a bit of a... otherwise you can get into that bit where they only ever see one of you and, so there is still stuff that you need to navigate and go, oh, you should probably do that call and not me just to make sure that we split the visibility (*Female, Senior Manager, Jobshare, Financial Services*)

”

Being open and up-to-date with online calendars was another popular strategy, as was having set days for big team meetings

Challenges of WFH

Some identified challenges

- Line managers demanding face to face meetings at short notice
- Trying to ensure that not being visible in the office was not having a negative impact on direct reports
- Having 'less influence' due to reduced visibility

Enforced WFH During the Pandemic

Issue of 'visibility' much less of a concern – 'all in the same boat'
Most felt positive about WFH but there were far more challenges identified

Positives

- Ability to get more work completed
- More time at home (less travelling and client meetings in the evening)
- More business opportunities - on-line overcomes location

Negatives

- Missing out on interactions with clients and co-workers
- Sharing space at home with other family members
- Juggling work with childcare and home-schooling (often led to working into the evenings and early morning starts)
- Work intensification
- Getting 'up to speed' with technology, e.g. Zoom, Teams

Work Intensification

“

If you're organised anyway, it's amazing how much I can power through in a week, and I still do mentoring, I still develop myself, I'll still find a way of squeezing in... I think nowadays it's easier to squeeze in a webinar here and a network session, because it's online. So you're not actually running around trying to go places and stuff (*Female, Director, Hospital Trust*)

For me, I personally am finding my job way less enjoyable. One, I'm sat down all day; I'm so much less active. I'm confined to this room, working for an [overseas] company. Quite often, an awful lot of the discussions that they want to have are at 7.00, 8.00, 9.00, 10.00 at night... Because you're here, and they know you're here, and I am constantly in meetings... well, in... in Zoom calls... I am definitely doing way more work. yeah, definitely. So, I'm contracted only to three days a week... (*Female, Director, Marketing*)

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Challenges around childcare and home- schooling

“

It's hugely challenging so um my husband is also working from home so we take it in turns to kind of entertain the kids, and with work by working a bit in the evenings after the kids have gone to bed *(Female, Head of Department, Financial Services)*

When the kids weren't at school, so when the school's shut... I mean, we... my husband and I did this crazy like juggling balancing act where we'd do an hour on, then we'd swap an hour, da, da, da. And that, for a few months, was pretty horrible. And I was just working far fewer hours than I would normally. Well, in fact, I was working all the evenings. It was horrible for like three or four months there. *(Female, Head of Department, Social Enterprise)*

It's like, we're [employer] understanding if your kid's there. We're understanding that you might have to work the evenings. But they don't go, 'Well we're going to reduce your work because of that,' do they? So fundamentally, like, you've still got to get stuff done. *(Female, Head of Department, Multinational)*

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Recognised challenges for colleagues WFH

- Challenges:
 - Lack of social interaction for those living alone
 - Mental health challenges due to living alone/isolation
 - New recruits feeling 'out in the cold'
 - Limited spaces to work
 - Lack of facilities (e.g. working in kitchens, bedrooms, on ironing boards, in cars)
 - Childcare issues for those with young children
- Actions taken by senior leaders:
 - Wellness plus pages, competitions, 'virtual pub' on a Friday
 - Being as flexible as possible with deadlines and work schedules
 - Keeping connected with the workforce
 - Encouraging community based volunteering
 - Having regular virtual coffee breaks with teams
 - Being accepting of those who won't put cameras on during meetings

Comments

“ The mental health side, you know, I think people always thought they'd love to work from home but now they're working from home they realise, particularly those people that live on their own, are feeling very isolated.
(Female, MD, Aerospace)

I feel a bit sorry for the graduates who have just joined us because those... they're probably left out in the... in the cold a bit... Because we've all got enough going on that we... you probably... we probably forget about them a little bit. And, you know, trying to involve them in things is more difficult. I think it's much easier from a home working perspective to involve people you already know and you already know face-to-face and have worked with. *(Female, Director, Engineering)*

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WFH: The Future?

- Interesting dilemma: interviewees generally like WFH but the pandemic presented a number of challenges
- Majority said that a hybrid model of home and office work would be the 'new normal' post-pandemic
- Pandemic and enforced WFH had changed the whole landscape of remote working, facilitated by digital strategies and the availability of technology
- Now more acceptable to meet clients virtually
- Less travel time/commuting was a big plus for many
- No appetite for total WFH as social interaction was still important
- Some recognised that team learning and productivity may suffer

Comments

“

I quite like going in, so I think I probably will, depending on pandemic related things, go in once a week still. It's quite nice, a change of scenery. *(Female, Head of Department, Multinational)*

So, I think there will be more freedom when we return to the office, there will be more freedom to work from home, for sure, and I think that will be part and parcel of normal working practices for our company anyway. *(Male, Head of Department, Multinational)*

I think increasingly I hope if anything we learn from Covid that presenteeism isn't all that. And one's mental health is so important, and it's your wellbeing, and work isn't everything. And that actually just taking the time... I just... I really hope we come out the other end of this doom and realise that. But for ... I hope to never work like a typical 9 'til 5, Monday through Friday... *(Female, Head of Department, Social Enterprise)*

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What are the implications of WFH on a reduced hours basis?

- **Visibility**: does this present further challenges around visibility? Or has the enforced WFH taught us that this way of working will be the future of work?
- While the **challenges** around childcare/home-schooling will become less of a problem, post-pandemic, will other challenges remain, e.g. mental health issues, work intensification?
- A challenge may be that this will be more costly for **organisations** (our job shares worked an average of 1.2 FTE)

Closing comments

- Participants in this study were mostly optimistic about a hybrid model of future working while working reduced hours; misgivings for some were around lack of social interaction with colleagues while WFH and workload expectations, and the role that organisations play in facilitating reduced hours.
- Our findings are mostly in line with the literature but there is a paucity of studies on reduced hours/PT workers, especially at senior levels
- Some issues for part-time/RH workers – more likely to be furloughed and a fall in numbers working PT
- Lots of issues and challenges for women especially
- No gender differences identified in our study (small sample of men) – rare and hard to reach
- Interestingly, visibility was main issue of WFH pre-pandemic but not during the pandemic (all in the same boat). Other challenges were identified instead



Questions?
Comments?

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CIPD (April, 2022a) More hybrid employers report increased productivity CIPD report finds

CIPD (April 2022b) An update on flexible working and hybrid working practices

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