



Welcome to Taking Care of Business

Toolkits, training and consultancy to engage, equip and enable managers to embrace flexible working and confidently build a culture of trust and exceptional communication within their teams.

Taking Care of Business

Case study #1: Gender inclusion project

In 2018 I lead an exercise to build a current and realistic picture of gender inclusion at a leading global financial services organisation, which was experiencing particularly high turnover among women under 40 and had a large gender pay gap. Understanding that the reports of a 'boys club' culture should not be ignored, the courageous executive team had assembled a project team whose task was to investigate the reasons behind these significant operational challenges and develop a set of recommendations for change based on the findings. I was appointed as an external consultant to offer an impartial perspective and work collaboratively with a diverse range of stakeholders.

I facilitated focus groups and 121 interviews to give women working in an environment brimming with obstacles and bias a safe and confidential space to be honest about their experiences for the first time in the company's history. The project team then invited the participants to become involved in creating the solutions to initiate real and long-lasting change. Drawing on their anonymised feedback and input, I devised and presented the recommendations to the Executive, urging them to see the findings as a catalyst for positive, decisive action.

These recommendations included:

- Addressing widespread inconsistency, bias and discrimination around flexible working;
- Introducing a transparent approach to career development and providing more support to managers;
- Facilitating increased networking, training and development opportunities for women;
- Enhancing relationships between HR Business Partners and managers across the business;
- Redesigning recruitment processes;
- Implementing a mentoring scheme;
- Improving the visibility of female role models;
- Introducing a new approach to supporting returners.

Outcomes

The group encountered predictable resistance as the investigation's findings were described as confronting for some senior employees who felt it was possible they may have contributed to the culture of exclusion that was reported by women in the focus groups and interviews.

I'm incredibly proud that as a result of our caring approach, our determination to uphold our commitment to the employees and our willingness to have some highly challenging conversations the company is now evolving and beginning to operate with inclusion at the heart of its decision making and its future.

Case study #2: Trial of ad-hoc flexible working arrangements for global cosmetics company

In 2019 I was engaged as a strategic consultant to support a project team tasked with delivering a small-scale trial of informal flexible working arrangements at a global cosmetics company. The aim of the trial, which ran for six months in early 2019 was to test a variety of different ways of working and assess its impact on productivity, wellbeing and retention.

Prior to the launch, leaders, managers and HR business partners were invited to a series of webinars to identify opportunities and potential challenges the business could face and to receive training and coaching to support them in applying the trial principles. The project team also developed a robust communications strategy that centred around the compelling message that the company understood that the world of work is changing rapidly and that it cared very deeply about its people and their role in its future. When the trial was launched, the trial participants were offered the opportunity to experiment with a range of flexible working options that were presented through a cascade pack containing a set of guiding principles and supported by training, resources and events. Teams were invited to come along to a series of events, all with the overriding aim to support and empower everyone – employees, managers and leaders alike – to be heard, involved and engaged in this progressive initiative.

These events included:

- Closed focus groups to give people the opportunity to discuss their feelings and experiences and explore their fears and resistances in a safe, confidential environment;
- Deep-dive one- and two-hour lunchtime sessions to give special focus to overcoming the most common barriers to increased flexible working such as trust, communication and bias. Each session would focus on one particular challenge, to give colleagues the chance to dedicate that time to reflecting on their own mindsets and learning how they could work collaboratively with other team members to improve;
- Drop-in clinics with the option of one-to-one appointments to work through specific issues;
- Coaching appointments for leaders and managers;
- Team sessions to support the participants to develop a team charter for flexible working.

Case study #2: Trial of ad-hoc flexible working arrangements for global cosmetics company (continued)

The progress of the trial was measured in a number of ways, including:

- a flexible working survey and interviews conducted before and after the trial;
- product output (from manufacturing and production teams);
- anecdotal feedback from managers and individuals;
- employee self-assessment of productivity and motivation;
- ongoing monitoring of turnover and retention data;
- ongoing monitoring of engagement scores through surveys.

Outcomes

Productivity increased by 22% and employees reported feeling 31% more motivated at work.

People are having better, braver conversations as a result of the work we did. They are learning to trust each other by default and to gently recognise and challenge their own bias.

They are supporting each other to work in ways that mean they can all combine their work and their lives more successfully, and that to me is the greatest legacy of our work on this project.

Case study #3: Training multiple teams across a global pharmaceutical business in creating team charters for flexible working

In 2019 I was engaged as an external consultant to support parts of a five-workstream project to close the gender pay gap at a global pharmaceutical business. One of the workstreams is flexible working, and the internal D&I team was making exceptional progress in amplifying the conversation about flexibility, creating opportunities for more colleagues to test different working hours, styles and locations and identifying the barriers that prevented increased uptake of flexible working.

The team needed support with achieving a long-term culture shift; in particular with equipping managers with the tools to confidently make flexibility work within their teams. So together we developed a strategy to empower and enable teams to take ownership of developing their own micro-culture for flexible working through the creation of team charters.

A flexible working team charter is a document every team member contributes to, helps to shape and commits to. Its purpose is to:

- Create a bespoke framework for flexible working within teams by working collaboratively and inviting the contribution of the whole team.
- Build a highly engaged team culture based on trust, accountability and autonomy.
- Agree what options for flexible working exist for the specific roles within each team so each member can deliver what is required of them and support the business in achieving its objectives while also modelling improved ways of working and enhancing wellbeing.
- Overcome the barriers that prevent many people from being able to take advantage of flexible ways of working by addressing issues at a local level.
- Agree clear expectations for delivery and performance; and to facilitate improved performance management as a result of this clarity.
- Agree appropriate communication channels and frequency.
- Decide on an approach to consider the motivation and inclusion of team members working flexibly.

We developed virtual training sessions for the Leadership team as well as a number of teams within key functions such as HR, Sales and Legal, and I am now also training internal champions to deliver these sessions virtually in order to maximise value for the client.

During the sessions, we cover the following:

- The strategic background, why the company is embracing a more flexible future and why flexible working matters so much;
- The benefits flexible working brings to a business and its people;
- What flexibility can look like (distinguishing between formal and informal flexible working);
- Why it means something different to everyone;
- An update on the latest thinking, research and proposed changes to the law on flexible working in the UK;
- An open discussion about attitudes, perceptions and experiences of flexible working (to address specific issues and build into the charter);
- An overview of the success model for flexible working I've developed to give broader context and demonstrate how the team charter fits into the bigger picture of culture change;
- An introduction to the team charter concept and how it can be a powerful catalyst to the widespread adoption of flexible working.
- The Taking Care of Business step-by-step guide to designing a team charter for flexible working, including a detailed focus on the main areas of challenge such as change, engagement, trust and communication. Each attendee receives an e-guide of the framework to keep.

Outcomes

These sessions have provided a powerful platform for colleagues to celebrate that they are already achieving incredibly positive things on the flexible working front; and to collaboratively design a way forward for their team that everyone has contributed to. 61% of participants report that they have a better understanding of how flexibility benefits the business as much as its people. The workshops have brought a strong sense of accountability and autonomy to the teams, and many of the former barriers – having been gently and without judgement brought out into the open – are slowly dissipating. (For example, 70% of participants feel that flexibility is now more accepted inside and outside of their team; while 40% report they are no longer making assumptions about each other.)

44% of participants say trust is increasing. The culture IS changing, and 87% of colleagues are reporting that they feel more able to work in ways that suit their lives, and they report that this enables them to be 26% more productive in delivering their best work. It's such a privilege to be part of something that makes such a difference to a business and its people.