Volunteering for a successful business

A report on the formal and informal policies on flexible working opportunities provided by employers to staff undertaking voluntary work and on the potential business benefits of such support

By

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1. Executive Summary ................................................................................................. 2

2. Report Overview ..................................................................................................... 4

3. Research Hypothesis and Methodology .................................................................. 8

4. Research Findings ................................................................................................ 9
   A. Management Survey .......................................................................................... 9
   B. Analysis of Recruitment Information on Company Websites ....................... 15
   C. The Benefits of Employee Volunteering ......................................................... 17
   D. Flexible Working: The Business Case ............................................................. 23

4. Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 31

5. References ............................................................................................................ 33
I. Executive Summary

Employers are increasingly willing to support employees who undertake voluntary activities but are keeping this support under wraps, missing opportunities to motivate and retain staff and to bring new skills and experience into their organisations. Volunteering can include charity work or public service, for example as a school governor or a military reservist.

A management survey of almost 1,000 people from multi-sized, cross-sector, UK, international and global organisations has revealed that over three quarters of them think their organisation would seriously consider providing part-time working / reduced hours (87%), unpaid sabbaticals / career breaks (82%) or additional unpaid annual holiday (77%) to enable employees to take part in volunteer activities.

However, organisations usually (71%) adopt an informal, low-key approach to requests for support for volunteering rather than creating more public and formal organisational policies.

In a review of the online recruitment information of 125 organisations, only 22% refer to flexible working opportunities of any type and only 14% directly highlight their support for volunteering. In the management survey, 34% maintained that people only become aware of their organisation’s support for volunteer activities when they have been with the organisation for some time and happen to enquire, and 69% felt that their organisation’s policies and practices around volunteering should be better publicised.

This is despite the clear business benefits linked to employee volunteering. According to the management survey, 76% of people believe that volunteering represents a personal development opportunity, while 72% maintain that it helps to motivate staff. Some 69% believe that employee volunteering brings new skills and experience and enhances the company’s corporate reputation. Over a third believe it has a direct impact on the recruitment (33%) or retention (40%) of high quality employees.

These results confirm earlier research into flexible working and support for volunteering which has also shown links with increased employee loyalty and commitment, such as surveys by the Work Foundation in 1998 and by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in 2005. Other research has also shown that some types of volunteer activities are effective at developing employees in key areas such as leadership, team working and communication.

The management survey also reveals a likely reason for the lack of publicity for the support which already exists and which (it is widely recognised) can bring a range of benefits to the employer. Only 7% of employers have any mechanism for evaluating the business benefits. Without this, employers have no means of deciding which requests from staff to support and appear to fear that increased publicity in recruitment literature and company policies could open the floodgates.
Recommendations for employers

- Employers should recognise that well-managed policies on flexible working to support volunteer activities have the potential to enhance corporate reputation, attract and retain high quality staff, and bring new skills and experience into the business or organisation.

- Employers can maximise these benefits by:
  - formalising and standardising policies on providing support; and
  - publicising these policies to both existing and potential employees.

- Employers should seek to manage any increase in requests for flexible working to support volunteering by developing a means of evaluation which takes account of the likely business benefits as well as the employer’s and employee’s circumstances.
2. Report Overview

Author

This research has been conducted by Claire McCartney, a Senior Researcher at Roffey Park specialising in work-life balance, flexible working and well-being at work. Roffey Park is an educational charity with over 50 years’ experience of developing managers and individuals and has a successful track record for high quality, independent research.

Methodology

A mixture of primary and secondary research was conducted for this project, comprising:

A quantitative survey of 967 directors, senior, middle and junior managers and HR professionals across all sectors into flexible working and volunteering, to investigate specifically:

- The informal practices which exist, by asking how managers would respond to requests for different types of flexible arrangements to enable external personal development opportunities
- The formal practices, by asking about what is set down in company / organisation policy.

Desk research analysing online recruitment material to establish the degree to which flexible working opportunities are promoted to potential employees.

A review of existing research to summarise:

- The increasing expectation amongst employees and potential employees that flexible working opportunities should be available
- The case for increased availability of flexible working to improve recruitment and retention
- The benefits of external activities in bringing new skills and experience into the company / organisation

Results

Management survey – flexible working

A sample of 967 managers responded to questions about both their personal and organisation’s attitude towards flexible working and volunteering. The key findings are detailed below:

- Part-time working (89%), working from home (61%) combined office and homeworking (60%) and job-shares (58%) were most common in respondents’ organisations
• Over half of the sample (57%) would personally like to have a more flexible working pattern
• Very few organisations appear to actually measure the business benefits of flexible working. A massive 93% maintain that this is not something that their organisation does

Management survey – support for volunteering

• Most (71%) organisations deal with requests for volunteering in an informal, case-by-case manner as opposed to through written policies
• Most employees only become aware of their organisation’s volunteer policies in response to a question when they have been at the organisation for some time
• The top four business benefits associated with supporting volunteer activities include:
  – a personal development opportunity for employees (76%)
  – helping to motivate staff (72%)
  – bringing new skills / experience / ideas into the organisation (69%)
  – enhancing corporate reputation (69%)
• over half (62%) of the sample were unaware that 2005 had been designated the ‘Year of the Volunteer’ by the government
• finally, most respondents were happy with the volunteering support available from their organisations but felt that it should be better publicised

Recruitment information

Analysis of the websites of 125 cross-sector, small, medium and large, UK, international and global organisations was conducted. This analysis particularly focused on online recruitment material to establish the degree to which flexible working opportunities are promoted to potential employees.
• Only 22% of the organisations analysed referred to flexible working opportunities in their online recruitment information. When other areas of the websites were analysed for references to flexible working, only 7% were found to visibly promote flexible working
• Flexible working is much more likely to be mentioned in online recruitment information within larger organisations
• Few (14%) had formal employee volunteering schemes in place

The benefits of employee volunteering

The potential of employee volunteering as a way of developing staff skills and experiences while supporting the community / country has increasingly been recognised by a number of organisations in recent years.
Support from the Government has increased the profile of employee volunteering, with 2005 declared the ‘Year of the Volunteer’ by the Chancellor Gordon Brown.
Key business benefits linked to volunteering, highlighted by the research include:

- General and specific skill, experience and knowledge development
- Practical challenges give employees the opportunity to develop project management, planning, communication, budgeting and trouble-shooting skills
- Leadership development
- Recruitment and retention
- Increased job satisfaction, commitment, morale and loyalty
- Enhanced organisational image / reputation

Flexible working: the business case

- Flexible working is growing in the UK, although fixed rather than flexible hours remain dominant. Despite long working hours, the UK is not achieving the same levels of productivity as other high skill, high wage economies.
- Recent years have seen a massive increase in the number of employees desiring more flexible working patterns – people’s expectations of work are changing.
- Government legislation around flexible working was introduced in April 2003. Increasingly, best practice organisations are creating flexible working policies that are reason-independent and can be applied to all. Flexible working can also help organisations become ‘employers of choice’.
- The recruitment and retention of valuable employees is a key part of the business case for flexible working. The CIPD 2005 Flexible Working survey found that staff retention is the main reason for organisations introducing flexible working practices.
- The research suggests that flexible working policies can produce tangible benefits to the bottom-line and overall increased productivity gains. There is also evidence to suggest that flexible working practices can increase employee motivation, reduce stress, sickness and absenteeism levels. Flexible working is also often associated with increased organisational loyalty and increased customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

The survey data suggests that most organisations are offering flexible working options (although the scope of patterns offered could be greater) and a large number would be willing to offer flexibility to enable volunteering. However, the business benefits are not being actively measured and tangible evidence is not being produced. This is something that needs to be addressed if business leaders are to be convinced of the importance of such policies and practices.

Requests for volunteering are predominantly dealt with on an informal, case-by-case basis rather than through formal organisational policies.
The secondary research conducted for this project, underlines the business case for both flexible working and specifically volunteering. It provides evidence from a number of different sources of tangible benefits to the bottom line and overall increased productivity gains. Perhaps the key benefit of providing greater flexibility of working patterns is the recruitment and retention of valuable employees.

Policies, practices and indeed attitudes around flexible working and volunteering are not being effectively publicised / communicated internally or externally by organisations. Employers are therefore ‘missing a trick’ by not publicising the support they already provide in terms of flexible working and volunteering. In the new ‘War for Talent’, opportunities for volunteering provide the potential for positive PR and an enhanced corporate image – a key weapon in today’s competitive labour markets.
3. Research Hypothesis and Methodology

Hypothesis

Many employers are willing to consider flexible working arrangements for employees who wish to undertake volunteer activities. These are activities which contribute to society and / or provide personal development for the employee – such as acting as a school governor, being a magistrate, serving in the Reserve Forces, acting as a Special Constable or organising charity activities.

The level of support available from employers was illustrated in a 2004 survey\(^1\) which showed that 68% of employers said that they would allow unpaid sabbaticals of several months to take advantage of a personal development opportunity, and 72% said they would allow additional (paid or unpaid) time off for training with the Reserve Forces.

However, very few employers have formal policies which reflect this degree of flexibility and support – let alone promote it as a benefit to existing or potential employees. This is despite a growing expectation amongst employees that such activities should be supported.

This gulf between what is done and what is said means that many employers are missing an increasingly valuable opportunity in the ongoing battle to attract and retain the best employees.

Methodology

A mixture of primary and secondary research was conducted for this project, namely:

- A quantitative survey of 976 directors, senior, middle and junior managers and HR professionals across all sectors into flexible working and volunteering, more specifically:
  - The informal practices which exist, by asking how managers would respond to requests for different types of flexible arrangements to enable external personal development opportunities
  - The formal practices, by asking about what is set down in company / organisation policy

Desk research of the online recruitment material of 125 cross-sector, small, medium and large organisations to establish the degree to which flexible working opportunities are promoted to potential employees.
A review of existing research to summarise:

- The increasing expectation amongst employees and potential employees that flexible working opportunities should be available
- The case for increased availability of flexible working to improve recruitment and retention
- The benefits of external activities in bringing new skills and experience into the company / organisation
4. Research Findings

A. Management Survey

In October 2005, a sample of 967 managers were asked about both their personal and their organisation’s attitude towards flexible working and volunteering. The sample contained a mixture of senior, middle and line managers and people from multi-sized, cross-sector, UK, international and global organisations.

Flexible working

The survey sought, firstly, to gauge the availability and prevalence of different types of flexible working patterns within organisations. The most popular patterns included part-time working (89%), working from home (61%), combined office and home-working (60%) and job-shares (58%). The compressed working week (32%) and term-time working (31%) are also offered by organisations but to a lesser extent, while phased retirement (15%) and associate schemes (5%) are much less common (see graph 1).

Graph 1: Availability of working patterns
Respondents were asked whether they would personally like to have a more flexible work pattern. Over half of the sample (57%) maintained that they would.

Interestingly, the age group most likely to be seeking greater flexibility was the 31-40 year olds (63%) and the age group least likely was the 60+ year olds (27%)(1).

Respondents from larger organisations are more likely to want a more flexible working pattern: 65% of people from organisations with 1001-5000 employees want greater flexibility compared to just 37% from organisation with 50 employees or less(2). Additionally the professionals most interested in more flexibility are technical workers with 73% seeking greater flexibility compared to those in finance with only 42% seeking greater flexibility (3).

Measuring benefits

Very few organisations appear to actually measure the business benefits of flexible working. A massive 93% maintain that this is not something that their organisation does. However, larger organisations of 5000 employees or more are significantly more likely to measure the business benefits of flexible working (11%) (4). Those organisations that do attempt to measure the benefits use a variety of methods, including: employee opinion surveys, key performance indicators, productivity, turnover and absence levels, measured performance appraisals, office costs saved, auditing home-workers, maternity leave return rates and pilot projects.

Year of the Volunteer

A large proportion of the sample (62%), were unaware that 2005 had been designated the ‘Year of the Volunteer’ by the government. Of those that were aware of this (38%), almost half (18%) maintained that their organisation had participated / contributed to this in some way. Respondents from both the Not-for-Profit Sector (60%) and the Public sector (47%) were significantly more likely to be aware of this campaign (5). Respondents from purely UK-based organisations were also significantly more likely to be aware of this campaign as opposed to European (20%), International (31%) and Global organisations (34%)(6).

Support for volunteering

Respondents were given a list of flexible working options and asked to choose which options (if any at all) their organisation would seriously consider providing to enable employees to take part in volunteer activities. Encouragingly, over half of the respondents to this question (593) would seriously consider providing 6 out of the 9 options listed. Top of the list were part-time working/ reduced hours (87%), unpaid sabbaticals / career breaks (82%), additional unpaid annual holiday (77%) and some home-working / teleworking (63%). This suggests that employers are increasingly accommodating towards employees who want to undertake voluntary work.
Nature of employer policies

Respondents were asked whether their organisations had formal policies for the above flexible working options or whether requests were considered on a case-by-case basis. Interestingly, respondents indicated that they had predominantly formal policies for part-time working / reduced hours (59%), unpaid sabbaticals / career breaks (58%) and job shares (49%) and predominantly informal / case-by-case practices for all the other types of flexible working listed above.

In the majority of organisations, requests for flexible working to enable volunteer activities are dealt with informally, at managerial discretion and on a case-by-case basis (71%) as opposed to through formal written down policies (29%). The slight exception to this is within the Public sector, which is significantly more likely to have formal policies around volunteering than other sectors (38%)\(^7\). Larger organisations of 5000+ employees are also significantly more likely to have formal volunteering policies (36%)\(^8\).

Business benefits

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the business benefits of supporting volunteer activities. The key benefits that they referred to tended to focus around the personal development of employees and the new skills brought back into the organisation and the enhancing of their corporate reputation.
Graph 3: The business benefits of supporting volunteer activities

- It is a personal development opportunity: 70% of cases
- Helps to motivate staff: 72% of cases
- Brings new skills/ experience/ ideas into the organisation: 69% of cases
- Enhances the corporate reputation: 69% of cases
- Makes the organisation more respected: 60% of cases
- Makes the organisation more interesting place to work: 48% of cases
- Encourages workforce diversity: 48% of cases
- Simply the ‘right thing to do’: 42% of cases
- Improves management/ leadership: 42% of cases
- Makes the organisation a happier place to work: 40% of cases
- Helps to retain high quality employees: 40% of cases
- Helps to attract high quality employees: 28% of cases
- Helps organisation better informed about customers/market: 19% of cases
- Reduces staff turnover: 19% of cases
- Increases productivity: 13% of cases
- Reduces absenteeism: 13% of cases
- Improves profits: 7% of cases
- Other: 1% of cases

Other benefits emphasised include encouraging workforce diversity (48%), making the organisation a more interesting (48%) and happier (40%) place to work and improving management/leadership in the organisation (42%). Respondents also felt that providing volunteering opportunities can help to both retain (40%) and attract (33%) high quality employees. Finally, 43% of the sample felt that supporting volunteering did not need a business reason and was simply ‘the right thing to do.’

Knowledge of policies

Respondents were asked whether their organisations had policies on flexible working for volunteer activities, and when they thought most people would become aware of them. Interestingly, most respondents suggested that such policies were not well publicised or communicated and felt that employees would only become aware of them in response to a question after they had been at the organisation for some time (34%).
It is unsurprising then, that 37% of the sample were happy with the volunteering policies that were offered by their organisation but felt that they should be better publicised. Only 2% felt that their organisation should be less accommodating, while 30% felt there should be no change and 32% wanted their organisation to be more accommodating and to better publicise what they do currently offer.
B. Analysis of recruitment information on company websites

Analysis of the websites of 125 cross-sector, small, medium and large, UK, International and Global organisations was conducted. This analysis particularly focused upon online recruitment material to establish the degree to which flexible working opportunities are promoted to potential employees.

Only 22% of the organisations analysed, actually referred to flexible working opportunities in their online recruitment information. We also analysed other areas of the websites for references to flexible working and found that only 7% visibly promoted flexible working.

Flexible working is much more likely to be mentioned in online recruitment information within larger organisations. Within organisations of 250 employees or less only 4% referred to flexible working compared to 29% of organisations with 1,000 employees or more.

Only 14% had formal employee volunteering schemes in place. Just 1% directly referred to allowing time for reservist training. Larger organisations of 1,000 employees or more were both more likely to mention opportunities to volunteer and have a formal volunteer scheme in place.

Only 14% of organisations described or outlined their flexible working options in more detail. Of those, the majority (33%) referred to part-time working, followed by job shares (16%) and term-time working (15%). Working from home (7%), compressed working (6%), career breaks (5%), annual hours (6%) and seasonal working (6%) were also referred to, but to a lesser extent. Larger organisations were more likely to detail flexible working options - within organisations of 250 employees or less only 4% outlined flexible working options compared to 23% of organisations with 1,000 employees or more.

Graph 1 illustrates the sectors most likely to promote flexible working on their websites. All of the Public Health organisations (100%) examined referred to flexible working. A high proportion of Public Administration (78%) (including corporate and local government), Education (66%) and Private Health (50%) websites also promoted flexible working in their recruitment information.
Graph 2 illustrates the sectors most likely to advertise opportunities for employees to volunteer on their websites. Hotels and Restaurants (50%) and Financial Intermediary companies (50%) are most likely to advertise volunteering opportunities. Electricity, gas and water supply (29%), Real Estate (29%) and Transport companies also refer to volunteering opportunities but to a lesser extent.
Finally, the analysis suggests that flexible working is more likely to be referred to on UK websites (44%), compared to global (12%) and European / international (0%). However, global organisations appear most likely to mention opportunities to volunteer (27%) compared to European / international (12%) and UK only (9%).

C. The Benefits of Employee Volunteering

The potential of employee volunteering as a way of developing staff skills and experiences while supporting the community / country has increasingly been recognised in recent years. Support from the government has helped to raise the profile of employee volunteering. Indeed, 2005 was declared the ‘Year of the Volunteer’ by the Chancellor Gordon Brown, to celebrate the work volunteers do and as a call to action to get more people volunteering.

There are a number of current business and social factors that have led to this increased focus on volunteering. Firstly, organisations are experiencing a vast amount of change and this can often impact on organisational structures and affect traditional career opportunities and paths. Volunteering can therefore provide a different opportunity for career development. Individuals are also striving to get a better balance between their work and non-working lives and senior managers in particular are becoming disenchanted with the rigid divide between work and life. More and more employees appear to be searching for meaning and a better sense of belonging and connectedness as evidenced by Roffey Park’s annual Management Agenda surveys. (1) Finally, there has also been a significant and marked interest by organisations in corporate social responsibility.

Volunteering can be arranged in a number of different ways. Formal programmes allow organisations to focus their effort in particular areas that sit well with their corporate activities and the skills of their staff. However, companies may also support ad hoc employee volunteering by providing matched funding or allowing staff time off work to participate in the activities of charitable organisations or national services. (2)

There are numerous examples of types of volunteering, including:

- Mentoring
- Reservists
- Business advisors for not-for-profit organisations and small businesses
- Trustee roles
- Educational and development roles
- Employability
- Renovating community buildings
- Befriending
- Conservation projects
- Roles in public life
- School governors
Drivers for individuals

There are a number of different reasons why employees might wish to become involved in voluntary work. Voluntary involvement could help satisfy their quest for fulfilment and meaning through helping a cause that they personally believe in. Such work can also provide an opportunity to do something new and interesting, to use their existing skills and experience and to explore their own strengths. Volunteering could also improve employees' job opportunities and provide an environment to practice leadership skills and network with influential people.

More specifically, employee benefits, which often translate into organisational advantages could include:

- Providing exposure to different cultures and different ways of working
- An opportunity to apply existing skills in new environments
- An opportunity for innovative thinking and learning in unfamiliar territories
- An opportunity to try out more senior roles before taking up a similar role internally
- An opportunity to learn alternative business methods
- Broader networking opportunities
- Road test future career ideas
- An opportunity for meaningful work
- Discover hidden skills and talents

Business Benefits

Business in the Community

Business in the Community\(^\text{(3)}\), maintain that volunteering can:

- Complement a company’s business objectives
- Add value to the development of human resources
- Enhance the public perception of the company
- Be an integral part of the life of the organisation

A range of other key business benefits linked to volunteering are outlined below:

Skills and experience

The skill development and experience gained through volunteering projects is widely regarded as valuable not only to individuals but to organisations in general. Volunteering can be a great way to practice business skills – indeed many employers use community programmes in induction, providing new staff with an opportunity to practice skills in a real environment. Practical challenges give employees the opportunity to develop project management, planning, communication, budgeting and trouble-shooting skills.\(^\text{(4)}\)
Geroy et al (5) (2000) highlight a range of skills and experience developed through voluntary work that can be applied to organisations. These include:

- Skills gained and contacts made that can be used at work
- Enhanced opportunities for knowledge building
- The opportunity to see how others live
- An appreciation of what one has
- An enjoyable break from work or life – soften the impact of work problems
- Improved work teams
- New and innovative ideas that can be used at work

Further skills that individuals can hone and develop through volunteering work include:

- Financial and budgeting skills
- Understanding, influencing and persuading people and organisations
- People skills – listening, negotiating, and managing others
- Networking and alliance building
- Information management and analysis
- Coaching and mentoring

Zurich Financial Services (6) provides employees with a risk-free environment away from their peers and colleagues where they can try out new experiences, new behaviours, new ways of doing things and also add value, often in a more immediate way than is possible for them in their working environment. They maintain that community involvement programmes offer staff a number of opportunities for development, through less structured opportunities where the focus is on enjoyment through participation, but where there are also opportunities for individual and team development.

Diageo (7) is one of the world’s largest alcohol beverage companies. It has a worldwide community involvement programme that focuses on providing support at a local level in areas such as education and the environment. The company recognises that as well as benefiting society, voluntary activities also act as a developmental tool for employees. Moreover, by involving employees from throughout the group, community activity helps to break down departmental and hierarchical barriers.

At KPMG (8) it is reported that employees involved in volunteering experience a shift in mindset and a change in how they perceive things through their work with people from various backgrounds and in different situations from their own.

Recent research conducted by Liverpool John Moores University et al examined the potential intellectual capital gains to businesses and other organisations across the UK from the learning and development achieved by members of the Reserve Forces whilst on active and peacetime service. (9)
The study identified the following competencies as being most widely developed by service in the Reserve Forces and transferable to civilian employment:

- Planning and decision-making
- Inspiring and motivating
- Team building and involving others
- Managing conflict and managing risk
- Communicating

The study concludes by highlighting the extensive skills and experience developed by reservists that can be easily transferred to create business success. The authors maintain that employers need to take a more holistic perspective of their employees’ capabilities and a deeper look at their untapped human talent bank.

**Leadership development**

A particularly important skill that is often developed through voluntary work is that of effective leadership. A 2002 IRS survey \(^{(10)}\) of 35 organisations reported that 64% of organisations believe that volunteering actually increases leadership skills among employees.

Zurich Financial Services also maintain that leadership skills can be developed through volunteering - providing many employees with the opportunity to develop in areas that may not normally be associated with their job, such as leadership, project management and communication.

Deloitte & Touche \(^{(11)}\) operates a structured Community Investment Programme allowing it to provide help to charity, small business and schools, while not interfering with client commitments. The organisation highlights some of the leadership ‘constituent behaviours’ developed through such volunteering, including ‘experience of acting as a high-level business adviser or mentor’ and ‘supporting others to achieve their goals.’

At Barclays Bank \(^{(12)}\) managers saw the greatest impact on their staff in terms of increased leadership skills – 56% reported that staff leadership skills had improved.

The Reservist research also highlights the leadership skills developed in service that can then be brought back to employees’ place of work. The research found that all interviewees had received leadership training and had lead teams both on exercise and during general training. They had received feedback on their leadership capabilities from which they had been able to develop their skills further and this leadership experience was of particular value to their civilian employment.

The research also shows that there is a strong correlation between the key management capabilities developed by reservists and the key weaknesses identified in general British management. It illuminates the potential for the Reservist to be utilised to address four of the five management deficits:

- Leadership
- Process design
- Communication
- Team focused culture
Recruitment and retention

Employee volunteering involvement is important to recruitment and staff retention because:

- Increasingly potential recruits are choosing employers who behave responsibly
- It gives employees the power to make a difference to issues that they care about, sending a clear message that the organisation cares about its employees
- Volunteering is seen as fun and helps employees feel good about themselves and about their employer

A 2001 Reed and TimeBank Survey \(^{(13)}\) of 200 organisations found that almost three-quarters prefer to recruit people with volunteering experience on their CV and 60% are more likely to promote and give pay rises to employees who have donated their time. Over half (58%) of the companies surveyed believe that voluntary work experience can be more valuable than experience gained in paid employment. Caudron, 1994; and Backhaus et al., 2002 \(^{(14)}\) also maintain that volunteering can help recruit and retain highly qualified employees, it can also often help to build a more diverse and better-balanced workforce. Furthermore, in the 2002 IRS survey 55% of organisations maintain that volunteering is an aid to recruitment and 27% suggest it helps them to retain good staff.

Zurich Financial Services views employee community involvement as ‘corporate glue’ helping to create loyalty and giving people a reason to stay with the company. In turn this helps to create better workers and reduce staff turnover.

KPMG suggests that in addition to the strong moral case for taking a responsible approach to society, it makes good business sense to work in partnership with clients and suppliers, and also helps them to attract and retain the best people. Employees gain new knowledge, improved communication skills and more effective leadership skills, which in turn increases motivation among all staff, decreases staff turnover and enhances KPMG’s reputation with external audiences, including being an employer of choice with potential new recruits.

Barclays Bank has seen continued growth in employee volunteering over the past three years, with participation more than doubling between 2001 and 2003. Employee volunteering has had a number of positive impacts on Barclays, including increasing employees’ pride in the company, increasing staff job satisfaction, improving team working and raising Barclays profile in local communities. These can have strong knock on effects in terms of recruitment and retention. As one Barclays’ volunteer suggests: “Although I get head hunted a lot… for me, (employee volunteering is) one of the main reasons I have stayed with Barclays.”

Job satisfaction, commitment, morale and loyalty

Research also suggests that providing employees with opportunities for volunteering can improve job satisfaction and boost morale, commitment and loyalty. Amongst other things, providing volunteering opportunities can create more motivated, energised and committed employees, encourage employees to work together, build a sense of organisational community and encourage employees to identify with the values of the organisation.
Lewin (1991) (15) found that employee morale was up to three times higher in companies that were actively involved in volunteer programmes. This was particularly true if the CEO was directly involved in the volunteer programme (Carole, 1990) (16). Wild (1993) (17) also reported that volunteering can enhance job-related skills and improve work attitudes. A study conducted at Pacific Northwest Bell reported that volunteer participation was significantly related to both organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Stebbins, 1989) (18). At Barclays Bank taking part in regular volunteering increases job satisfaction: the more times an employee has volunteered through Barclays the more likely it is that his or her job satisfaction has increased.

London Electricity Group (19) recognises the value of an active community programme to drive business performance by building a vibrant workforce and customer base. Some 90% of volunteers confirm that doing so makes them feel more positive about working for the company, on the basis of the skills gained, the sense of responsibility and increased motivation. Finally the 2002 IRS survey found that 64% of organisations with volunteering schemes felt that it improved employee morale.

Organisational image/reputation

Volunteering can enhance employer reputation and brand image and provide a positive way of demonstrating CSR. It can also increase an organisation’s knowledge and understanding of the local community. 83% of managing directors of small and medium-sized enterprises believe that social responsibility will become increasingly important to businesses like theirs over the next five years (20).

The Reed / TimeBank survey found that from a commercial point of view, over two-thirds of employers feel that supporting employee volunteering enhances the community profile of the organisation and three-quarters believe it helps to develop good community relations. This in turn can lead to greater advocacy of both the employer as a place to work and of the employer’s products or services. The 2002 IRS survey found that all organisations involved in volunteering say that it improves their relationship with local community groups and 91% maintain that it provides good publicity.

Bain and Company (21), a leading global strategy consultancy, supports employee volunteering through ongoing projects and through more ad hoc challenges and commitments. Bain believes its volunteering activities have enhanced the firm’s corporate image and reputation among existing and potential clients. Bain estimates that around 960 people were directly exposed to its branding at charity events during 2000. (3)

More volunteers than non-volunteers would recommend Barclays as an employer (67% of volunteers compared with 58% of non-volunteers). Additionally, pride in Barclays increased with the number of times staff had volunteered: those who had volunteered four or more times were more likely to agree that they talked to family and friends about Barclays’ support for the community than those who had volunteered only once (78% compared with 64%).
Finally, the difficulties associated with allowing employees time off to perform public or civic duties appear to be minimal. The IRS 2005 survey of 77 organisations found that the majority 61% reported no difficulties and did not believe that staff absences affected teamwork or business productivity.

D. Flexible Working: the Business Case

The business case for introducing flexible working options is becoming increasingly obvious and critical. Rather than being seen as simply a ‘nice to have’ there is a substantial volume of research that suggests that for many organisations flexible working is fast becoming a business imperative. A mixture of social, economic and business drivers for change culminated in the introduction of Government legislation around flexible working in April 2003. The legislation affords a right for parents of young (under the age of 6) and disabled children to request a flexible working pattern and a duty on employers to consider their application seriously.

Flexible work scheduling not only enables organisations to attract and retain a diverse workforce but can also significantly increase company productivity. Furthermore, greater flexibility in employees’ work patterns can help to meet customer demand, improve workload management and increase employees’ capacity to meet targets and make customer needs their top priority. Flexible working programmes can also result in reduced absence and increased employee quality of life, motivation and commitment.

Flexible working can also enable employees to participate in other activities such as volunteering, community work or reservist service, which generate business benefits in the form of new skills and experience brought back into the organisation.

The CBI points out that flexible work patterns, including part-time, agency, fixed-term as well as tele-work, can bring benefits to employers and employees. However, it maintains that the UK is losing ground in this area compared to some other European countries.

Although flexible working is growing in Great Britain, fixed rather than flexible working hours remain dominant in the workplace. A survey in 2002 found that managers worked fixed hours in 40% of workplaces, whereas non-managers did so in 64% of workplaces (White et al, 2004).

Despite long working hours, the UK is not achieving the same levels of productivity as other high skill, high wage economies such as the US, France and Germany (HM Treasury, 2004)

The CBI argue that working time flexibility is about enabling employers and employees to arrange working time to suit the needs of both parties and it is not about people working longer hours.

The research evidence supporting the business case for flexible working is outlined below.
Employee expectations

In recent years there has been a massive increase in the number of employees desiring more flexible work patterns. People’s expectations of work are changing. Younger people want to have a range of experiences before they commit to full-time work; and both men and women want to be able to take time out of their careers at various points of their lives without damaging their prospects (Williams and Jones, 2005) (6). Increasingly best practice organisations are creating policies around flexible working that are reason-independent and can be applied to all.

A 2003 (5) Reed.co.uk survey in association with the DTI of 4,000 jobseekers suggests that 7 out of 10 (68%) employees would like the chance to work more flexibly. This is supported by findings from Roffey Park’s Management Agenda survey 2005(6) where a massive 90% (88% in 2004) of the sample maintain that there is a growing demand for different work patterns within their organisations. Additionally, 68% of respondents would personally like to have a more flexible work pattern and interestingly, men and women are equal in their desire for increased flexibility.

Research also shows an increasing desire for ‘time out’ and unpaid leave. A recent Work Foundation survey (2005) suggests that more than two-thirds of those polled believe career structures need to allow for time out without damage to career prospects and that organisations need to change their long hours’ culture. (7) Meanwhile, almost 6 out of 10 people quizzed by AON Consulting in 2004 said that they would be prepared to forgo some of their pay if they could have between three and six months unpaid leave. (8)

The opportunity to work flexibly is seen by many as a key employment benefit and attraction for jobseekers. The joint Reed.co.uk and DTI survey reported:

- Almost half of the respondents (46%) chose flexible working as the benefit they would most look for in their next job
- 45% of undergraduates or recent graduates would prefer flexibility in hours to a company car (14%) or gym membership (4%)
- A third of the sample would prefer the opportunity to work flexible hours rather than receive £1,000 more pay per year

The Recruitment Confidence Index’s 2005 Employee Confidence Survey of more than 5,000 people revealed that four out of ten viewed working hours as a crucial factor in choosing an employer while half also said it was important that an employer offered them good opportunities to balance work with home. (9) Additionally, research conducted by Lloyds TSB and Working Families in 2005 found that two-thirds of Britons would rather have a better work-life balance and flexibility than a pay rise in 2005. (10)
The Work-life Balance Base Study (11) also revealed that there is a substantial demand for flexible working time arrangements from employees. Flexitime is particularly popular, with nearly half (47%) of those not currently having access to flexitime wishing to adopt this working practice. This is followed by compressed week (35%) part-time work (26%) term-time work (25%), temporary reduced hours (24%) and annualised hours (21%). The survey reinforces the message that there are relatively few differences in the demand for more flexible working arrangements between parents and non-parents, men and women.

Furthermore, research conducted by Gemini Consulting (12) found that the global workforce shares a set of common desires and beliefs regarding work-life balance and flexibility. The study was based on 10,339 telephone interviews with people working in 13 industrialised nations across the world – from the UK and Europe to Japan, Russia and the US. Only in critical economic conditions, like those in Russia do employees put financial rewards above their need for work-life balance. Balancing the needs of work and personal life was one of their top three choices. Importantly, one third of workers worldwide would leave their current jobs for another that provides more flexibility.

As the already large proportion of employees desiring flexible working increases, so too will the pressure on companies to adopt flexible working practices.

**Recruitment and retention of talent**

The recruitment and retention of valuable employees is a key part of the business case for flexible working. A historically tight labour market, with employment now at 74.75% and unemployment at 4.75% means that employers face a particular challenge in attracting and retaining valuable and skilled workers (13). Organisations need to do all they can to retain their key talent, especially considering replacing skilled employees can cost up to two years’ salary according to analysis conducted by the Harvard Business review. (14)

The CIPD 2005 Flexible Working survey (15) of 585 UK organisations found that staff retention is the main reason for organisations introducing flexible working practices. In the eyes of the HR professionals completing the survey, helping recruitment (68%) and in particular retention (86%) are powerful motivators for using flexible working. Similarly, 24% of respondents to a 2005 web survey of HR professionals for the EOC reported that flexible working had improved staff retention. (16)

The CIPD survey also asks respondents to rate the effect of implementing flexible working practices on their organisation in a range of different areas. A desire to improve retention is the most popular motivation for making use of flexible working practices and HR professionals appear to believe they are seeing results in this respect. Almost one in three participants (27%) perceive flexible working as having had a major positive effect on retention and almost half (47%) say it has had a positive effect. 70% of survey respondents believe that flexible working practices have a positive effect on motivation and over half (51%) say the same about recruitment.
Additionally, research conducted by the NCSR of 1,509 organisations found that the majority of employers reported that work-life balance and flexible working practices had a positive impact upon recruitment (47%) and labour turnover (54%). (17)

A 2003 Manpower survey of 3,500 public and private employers maintains that attractive flexible working and work-life balance benefits have become key weapons in public sector attempts to attract a wider range of candidates. (18)

The National Work-life Forum’s 2000 report (19) highlights a number of organisations that have improved recruitment, retention and absence levels dramatically through the implementation of work-life balance and flexibility policies:

Glaxo Wellcome covered the costs of its childcare portfolio by savings from the reduction in unwanted staff loss. By 1994, more than 85% of women returned from maternity leave compared to 40% in 1988.

Midland Bank, now HSBC, was experiencing an adverse impact on both cost and quality in its banking division; high levels of women leaving following maternity leave (70%) was a major contributory factor. Instituting a range of family friendly policies resulted in 80% of women returning to work.

Almost all (98%) women who leave BT for maternity leave now come back, saving over £3 million in recruitment and induction costs alone. Additionally, within IXL Laundry, office turnover used to be considerable but with the introduction of flexible working in 2003, turnover fell to 0%. (20)

Flexible working can also help organisations become ‘employers of choice.’ Lloyds TSB believes that flexible working is a powerful tool to support the motivation and commitment of its people that really contributes to its goal of becoming an ‘employer of choice.’ This is because the scheme is open to all employees who can make a business case, regardless of their reason for wanting to work flexibly. (21) Companies voted best to work for in 1993 showed an 87% better growth than the market average over 7 years, according to a study by Hewitt Associates et al. (22)

Increased productivity

Increasingly organisations that are implementing flexible working policies, initiatives and investments in their people are reporting tangible benefits to their bottom-line and overall increased productivity gains. The DTI places work-life-balance policies within its strategic priority for maximising potential within the workplace. According to a report by Pam Walton (23) the DTI recognises the importance of the provision of high value jobs in high performance workplaces, where individuals can realise their full potential, whilst maintaining a healthy work-life balance.
The Chartered Institute of Personnel also emphasises the business benefits associated with flexible working. Mike Emmett, Employee Relations Advisor for the CIPD, says “The new law is a declaration of good practice and common sense… We would urge companies to go beyond compliance with the law, and to respond positively wherever possible to employees’ requests for flexible working. There are likely to be significant business benefits if they do.” (24)

In a survey undertaken for the London Institute of Accountants among 102 large private service sector employers, (25) respondent organisations reported productivity gains from part-time working due mainly to reduced absenteeism and also ‘viewed part-time managers as more committed and productive than full-time counterparts.’ Additionally, in a representative survey of US employers (26) only a minority (18%) perceive the costs of flexible working arrangement policies as outweighing the benefits, while nearly half (46%) perceive the benefits from such policies as outweighing the costs.

The National Centre for Social Research conducted a survey with 1,509 organisations and found that the majority of employers reported that work-life balance and flexible working practices had a positive impact upon productivity (49%). There was also an association between the provision of specific flexible practices and leave arrangements (such as flexi-time, job sharing and leave arrangements which went beyond the statutory minimum) and perceived financial performance. In terms of financial performance, almost two-fifths (39%) of workplaces that had four or more of these flexible practices and leave arrangements, reported that it was better than that of other similar workplaces in the same industry. Workplaces with either one or none of these practices were significantly less likely to perceive financial performance to be above average relative to their competitors (30%). The research also suggests that in the majority of cases (71%) employers confirmed that there were no ongoing costs associated with implementing flexible working. (27)

The National Work-life Forum’s 2000 report highlights the success of Hewlett Packard. The organisation ranked fifth in Fortune magazine’s 1998 most admired list for its across the board policies for personal development and flexibility. The company produced annual revenues of $42.9 billion and is the 3rd largest in the computer making business. Additionally, at Farrelly Engineering, sales increased fivefold and customer complaints reduced following the introduction of flexible working. (28)

Research has also shown how small businesses can benefit from working arrangements that enable employees to balance their work and home lives. A report by the Institute for Employment Studies (29) shows some small businesses save up to £250,000 on their budget, simply by using family-friendly work policies. Indeed, one company claimed profitability was up by 37%. The Asian Institute of Management (30) surveyed over one hundred companies who practice “corporate flexibility”. While respondents cited discrepancy over tele-commuting costs, and challenges adjusting to the new control mechanisms and administrative procedures, they also reported increased productivity, reduced labour costs, increased customer satisfaction and employee morale. Flexibility in working hours also enables employers to extend business hours, become more competitive and respond to fluctuations in goods and services and compete in global markets.
Increased productivity can be achieved, not only by improving retention, saving recruitment costs, helping with skill shortages, reducing stress related absence and improving motivation but also by tapping into the massive untapped potential in today’s part-time workers by opening up higher level work to them. Recent research conducted by the EOC (2005) suggests that Britain’s flexible and part-time working arrangements are failing to meet the needs of working women and men, leaving 5.6 million people, 4 out of 5 of Britain’s 7 million part-time workers working in jobs that do not use their potential. Over 3.5 million of these actually used higher qualifications or skills or had more supervisor/ management of staff in previous jobs, and a further 2 million believe that they could ‘easily work at a higher level.’ (31)

Flexibility can be implemented in a way that does not damage career prospects and productivity. BT call centre operators working from home handle up to 20% more calls, giving comparable or better quality responses than their office-based colleagues (32). At Lloyds TSB over 80% on the work-life balance work options scheme believed flexible working improved their performance (almost 90% of their managers endorsed this). Additionally, research conducted by the Work Foundation reinforces the message that employees who are in control of their work patterns and loads are increasingly likely to be productive at work 41% of full-time workers agree that if they were given more control over their time they would be more productive. Those who prioritise their career are far more likely to say that they would be more productive given more control over their hours. (33)

Awareness of the right to request and the confidence to ask for flexible working, (even by those not in the limited groups with a legal right to request), are growing. 14% of employees report that they had requested a change to their working arrangements in the last two years, with 81% of requests fully or partially accepted (Holt and Granger, 2005). (34) This suggests that employers are increasingly aware of the win-wins for both them and their employees. Positive flexible working policies can help employers to become employers of choice in tightening labour markets. Indeed a recent (2005) EOC opinion poll found that three-fifths of employees said the right to apply to work flexibly should be given to all.

Finally, further analysis of the Roffey Park Management Agenda 2004 (35) data of 735 managers suggests that respondents that come from organisations that are supportive of flexible working are more likely to feel that they are given the appropriate level of authority to do their jobs and more likely to class their organisations as financially successful.

**Increased motivation and commitment and reduced absence**

There is much evidence to suggest that flexible working policies can increase employee motivation, reduce stress, sickness and absenteeism levels.
The Workplace Employee Relations Survey\(^{(26)}\) found that:

- Three-fifths (60\%) of all managers reported that at least one of the following working arrangements were available to their non-managerial employees: work at or from home in normal working hours; work only during school or term times; switching from full or part-time employment and job-sharing
- Around three-quarters (74\%) of managers in workplaces which had any of these policies in place said that this had not led to additional costs or that they were minimal
- Most managers thought that these policies brought benefits, such as happier staff (50\%), an increase in the retention of employees (36\%) and other improvements such as reduction in absence levels (24\%)
- Employee commitment was strongly and positively related to the number of high commitment management practices in place, which include work-life balance practices or special leave schemes

The HSE reported that in 2003-04 an estimated 557,000 people in the UK believed that they were suffering from work related stress, depression or anxiety, resulting in an estimated 12.8 million lost working days (Jones et al, 2005)\(^{(27)}\). Similarly, DTI estimates that stress at work costs the UK £3.7 billion per year. Almost half HR professionals in the CIPD survey who implemented flexible working said it had a positive effect on absence levels in their organisations (CIPD, 2005)\(^{(28)}\).

The National Work-Life Forum’s 2000 report highlights the case of Johnson and Johnson, where the average number of days absent among all workers declined over a two-year period with the introduction of more generous flexible time and leave policies. Additionally, a 2005 Employee Advisory Resource survey of 52 organisations concluded that flexible working, being generous on compassionate leave and giving staff the option to work from home all help to cut down on absenteeism.\(^{(39)}\)

A US survey\(^{(40)}\) distributed to 500 random segments of the population in the Washington D.C metropolitan area, found that a wide majority of employees (74\%) perceived that flexible working was either a benefit to themselves, their employer, or both. Also, 65\% indicated that flexible working increased morale or productivity and 36\% stated that having a flexible working programme affected their decision to stay with their current employer.

Motivation was regarded as the second most important benefit in the CIPD survey; 22\% of employers stated that flexible working had a major positive effect on motivation\(^{(41)}\). Similarly, 25\% of HR professionals in the IFF survey reported that it had improved staff morale and motivation (IFF Research 2005)\(^{(42)}\).

Research has shown that BT people working from home are between 15\% and 31\% more productive – an average productivity increase of over 20\%. Absenteeism at BT is also down to 3.1\% compared to a UK average of 8.5\%. The more flexibility available, the more people feel trusted, empowered and willing to ‘go the extra mile.’\(^{(43)}\)
Finally, the second work-life balance survey conducted by the National Centre for Social Research of 1,509 organisations found that the majority of employers reported that work-life balance and flexible working practices had a positive impact upon employee relations (71%), employee commitment and motivation (69%) and absenteeism (48%). (44)

**Increased loyalty**

Half (50%) of firms surveyed in the 1998 Work Foundation’s Survey (45) felt that company flexibility generated increased trust, loyalty and commitment. WFD’s 1998 study found that 9 out of 10 British workers feel that the ability to balance work and personal life was a key factor in determining their loyalty to their employer. Additionally Joseph Rowntree Foundation research of smaller sector businesses that offered flexibility supported this finding, showing that increased loyalty and commitment were generated as a result of employers agreeing to flexible working arrangements. (46)

**Increased customer satisfaction**

Creating an environment where employees feel valued and supported is being recognised as the key to developing the kind of customer orientation that differentiates a company and results in marketplace success. The National Work-life Forum’s 2000 report highlights that at Tesco, management recognised that to serve customers more effectively they would need a happier, more flexible workforce. The roles and responsibilities of shelf-stackers’ jobs were changed to stimulate and facilitate more flexible responses to customer needs and to provide greater work-life balance for employees. The Tesco case demonstrated the power of a change effort that linked customer service with employee motivation and work-life balance.

Additionally one in four CIPD 2005 Survey participants believe that meeting customers’ needs is a very important reason for flexible working. (47) Finally, better retention means greater continuity of service and often better customer retention.
4. Conclusion

In summary, the research reviewed the business benefits of both flexible working and volunteering. Survey data helped establish a picture of both the informal and formal practices that exist around both options and the degree to which they are communicated and publicised by organisations internally and externally.

The survey highlights a number of business benefits associated with volunteering, including personal development opportunities (76%), motivation of staff (72%), enhancing corporate reputation (69%) and bringing new skills/experience/ideas into the organisation (69%). Other benefits identified in the literature include leadership development, recruitment and retention and increased job satisfaction.

Survey data suggests that most organisations are offering flexible working options (although the scope of patterns offered could be greater) and a large number would be willing to offer flexibility to enable volunteering. However, the business benefits are not being actively measured and tangible evidence is not being produced. This is something that needs to be addressed if business leaders are to be convinced of the importance of such policies and practices.

Requests for volunteering are predominantly dealt with on an informal, case-by-case basis rather than through formal organisational policies. One issue with this approach is that inconsistencies can arise if decisions are dependant on individual managerial discretion.

Organisations therefore need to think about having more formal policies around flexible working and volunteering or at least ensuring through training that line managers are consistent and fair in their approach to requests.

Another issue with adopting an informal, low-key approach to dealing with requests for flexible working and volunteering is that employers are not making the most of the policies and practices that they do offer. Out of 125 organisations, only 22% refer to flexible working opportunities in their online recruitment information and only 14% directly highlight opportunities to volunteer.

Policies, practices and attitudes around flexible working and volunteering are not being effectively publicised/communicated internally or externally by organisations – the majority of employees only become aware of what is on offer when they have been with the organisation for some time and happen to enquire. Employers are therefore ‘missing a trick’ by not publicising the support they already provide in terms of flexible working and volunteering. In the new ‘War for Talent’, opportunities for volunteering provide the potential for positive PR and an enhanced corporate image – a key weapon in today’s competitive labour markets.
The secondary research conducted for this project, underlines the business case for both flexible working and specifically employee volunteering. It provides evidence from a number of different sources of tangible benefits to the bottom line and overall increased productivity gains. Such policies and practices can also increase customer satisfaction, employee motivation, loyalty, and reduce stress, sickness and absenteeism levels. Perhaps the key benefit of providing greater flexibility of working patterns is the recruitment and retention of valuable employees. Recent years have seen a massive increase in the number of employees desiring more flexible working patterns, for a variety of reasons, and it is clear that people’s expectations of work are changing. Increasingly, employees are seeking greater meaning in both their personal and working lives and providing greater flexibility can help them achieve such aims. Employers of choice are now offering flexible working options to all of their employees, independent of reason.

**Recommendations for employers**

- Employers should recognise that well-managed policies on flexible working to support volunteer activities have the potential to enhance corporate reputation, attract and retain high quality staff, and bring new skills and experience into the business or organisation.

- Employers can maximise these benefits by:
  - Formalising and standardising policies on providing support
  - Publicising these policies to both existing and potential employees

- Employers should seek to manage any increase in requests for flexible working to support volunteering, by developing a means of evaluation which takes account of the likely business benefits, as well as the employer’s and employee’s circumstances.
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