

Changing the Career Ladder: Paving Flexible Pathways for Today's Talent

Topline Summary Report

A Q U E N T



Tuck **Executive Education** at Dartmouth
Thought leadership. Business results.

work+life fit INC.
IT'S FIT, NOT BALANCE

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Project Background and Objectives

Aquent, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, and Work+Life Fit, Inc., recently joined forces to survey both employees and hiring managers to better understand today's workforce and the phenomenon of career sequencing and workplace flexibility. As the demand for quality talent continues to intensify, it's important to have a broader awareness of how the workforce needs to adapt organizationally, managerially, and individually.

While there have been extensive research done and articles written on workplace flexibility the majority only focus on a specific segment of the talent pool. Whether the focus is on sequencing moms, on men and flexibility, on contractors, or on Baby Boomers, the underlying reality is that these segments of potential talent together create the total available talent pool employers should consider recruiting, hiring, and retaining.

Methodology and Sampling

The research was designed primarily to capture the perceptions or effects of taking time off from work among professionals, and to better understand the practices of recruiting and hiring professionals who are returning to the workforce after time off. Two online surveys were implemented: a survey of professional individuals in the workforce and a survey of corporations.

Individual survey. The targeted sample for the individual survey included male and female professionals ages 26–41 (Generation X) and ages 42–60 (Baby Boomers) whose minimum education consists of a four-year college degree. An online survey was sent to individuals using qualified lists and through the use of Web-based recruitment. A total of 495 professionals completed the survey.

Corporate survey. The targeted sample for the corporate survey consisted of manager-, director-, or VP-level executives with responsibility for the hiring and/or management of employees, including the recruitment and retention of employees. An online survey was sent to manager-, director-, or VP-level executives using qualified lists. Executives from a total of 190 separate firms completed the survey.

Key Findings: Paving Flexible Pathways for Today's Talent

KEY FINDING: People who consider taking career breaks and who want more flexibility aren't an aberration but instead reflect a broader overall shift in the traditional model of workday arrangements and a linear career path—particularly among Gen Xers as compared to Baby Boomers.

- 63% of respondents said they would consider leaving the workplace for a period of time—a majority of both men (58%) and women (68%).
- Younger workers (26–41 years old) are the most likely to say they would consider taking a career break (70%).
- The primary reasons for desiring to leave the workforce for a period of time were parenthood (63%), an avocation/life outside of work (43%), stress/burnout (37%), and entrepreneurship (35%).

KEY FINDING: Employees look to a host of options to break the traditional workday arrangement and career path model. When asked how they would improve their current work situation, the most cited requests included:

- 28% of respondents want more day-to-day informal flexibility, and younger employees (26–41 years old) are most likely to want this flexibility (32%).
- 20% would like the flexibility to telecommute, and younger employees (26–41 years old) are most likely to want this flexibility (25%).
- 17% suggest that project-based consulting work would improve their current work situation.
- For 14%, a reduced schedule would improve their current work situation.

KEY FINDING: Men are very interested in career breaks but for different reasons than women.

- While women ranked parenthood as the top reason they would leave the workforce (70%), for men avocation or life outside of work topped the list at 59%.

KEY FINDING: Men mistakenly believe their rationale for wanting a career break is not as “accepted” as women's.

- While men are almost as interested in taking a break as women (59% versus 70%), they are hesitant because they believe women are more likely to be granted a break from the workplace.
- 75% of men said that employers are more likely to say “yes” to a woman requesting a leave of absence from work.
- In addition, 85% of men said that employers are more likely to say “yes” to a person with children requesting a leave of absence from work.

KEY FINDING: In reality, company hiring managers don't favor a particular reason for a career break, as people think they do.

- While a majority of individuals felt companies were more understanding of women (63%) and people with children (77%) taking career breaks, less than half of hiring managers said they were more understanding of women (41%) and or more understanding of those with children (44%).

KEY FINDING: When it comes to corporate recruiting needs and practices, there is an opportunity to recruit from additional labor pools, including those professionals currently absent from the workforce and those seeking flexible work options.

- 41% of hiring managers said identifying enough qualified candidates in the traditional pool of recruits was their biggest talent management challenge.
- 85% said it was important to expand their employee recruitment pool.
- 51% said they actively recruit a broad range of individuals as long as those individuals are qualified.
- Despite this, only 36% currently recruit those absent from the workforce and only 34% recruit those seeking flexible work options.

KEY FINDING: Programs like Tuck's Back in Business directly address three of the top four reasons cited for not taking a career break despite a desire to.

- While making less money was the primary reason cited for not taking a break (57%), the top four other reasons—not being able to find a job (31%), losing your professional network (25%), losing your skill set (25%), and not knowing what resources are available to help you (14%)—may all be addressed by programs such as Back in Business.

KEY FINDING: Companies and individuals perceive a different level of importance on an updated skill set when re-entering the workforce. Having an updated skill set is more important to companies than those considering a career break realize.

- 25% of individuals cited losing their skill sets as one of the top four reasons for not pursuing a career break, behind money (57%), not being able to find a new job (31%), and losing their professional network (25%).
- College graduates with a four-year degree were more likely than those with a master's degree to say they would attend a Back in Business program to increase their confidence (86% vs. 63%).
- 61% of hiring managers said that an updated, current skill set was the most important success factor for hiring employees who had left the company or workforce.

KEY FINDING: Though flexibility has come a long way in workforce recruitment strategies, official corporate flexibility strategy still has a way to go if workplaces are going to benefit from the talent of an expanded talent pool.

- Only 52% of hiring managers view flexibility as a strategy for managing workflow and talent management challenges.

KEY FINDING: There is a gap between the official corporate flexibility strategy and current and cited future recruiting practices.

- While a majority of hiring managers said flexible hours (91%), telecommuting (79%), and project-based employment (53%) are valid workplace flexibility options, a smaller percentage of hiring managers actually offer these options.
- Flexible hours are offered by 80% of companies, while telecommuting is offered by 55% and project-based employment is offered by 36%.

KEY FINDING: Understanding of and buy-in to flexibility and expanded career path options need to occur at all levels—organizationally, managerially, and individually.

- Employees are most likely to go to their supervisor (24%) to discuss a need for workplace flexibility if they are seeking to change their current work arrangement.
- Organizations need to train frontline supervisors about expanding career path options and flexibility in order to attract and retain valuable talent.

KEY FINDING: Project-based employment can provide a “win-win” for companies and employees.

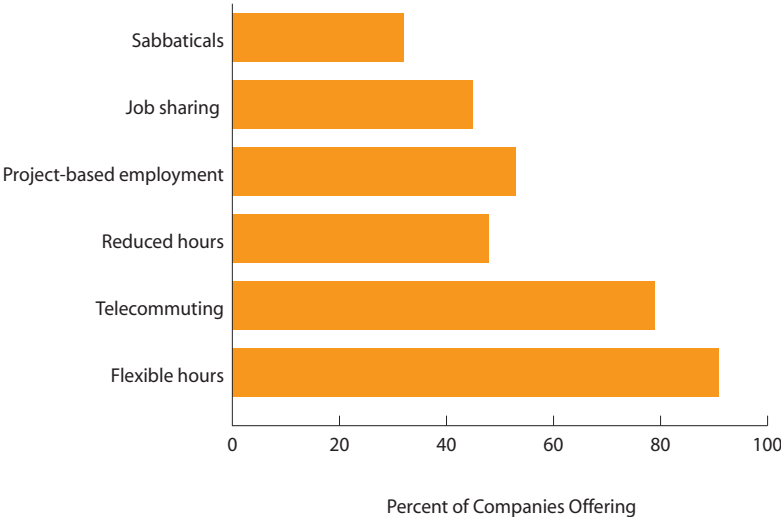
- 85% of corporations said that in the next ten years they would expand their recruitment strategy to include project-based employees and former employees who had left the workforce.
- 17% of those professionals currently working said their employment arrangement would be improved if they could work on a project basis.
- Despite this, only 45% of companies are actively recruiting project-based talent at this time.

KEY FINDING: Back in Business is an attractive program to a variety of audiences.

- Baby Boomers were most likely to say they would attend a program like Back in Business (34%).
- Women were more likely than men to say they would attend a program like Back in Business to provide a network (91% women versus 70% men) and increase confidence (76% women versus 54% men).
- Women were more likely than men to seek out information about a change in their current work arrangement from an affinity group (23% women versus 9% men).

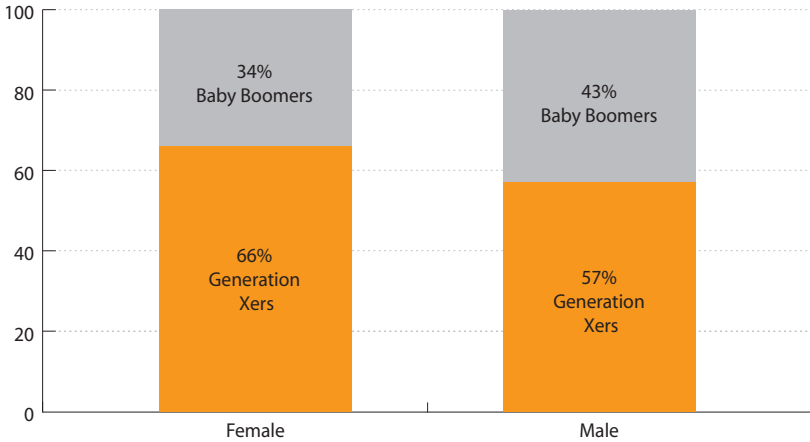
Specific Findings: Paving Flexible Pathways for Today's Talent

Figure 1. Percent of Companies Offering Flexible Work Arrangements, by Type



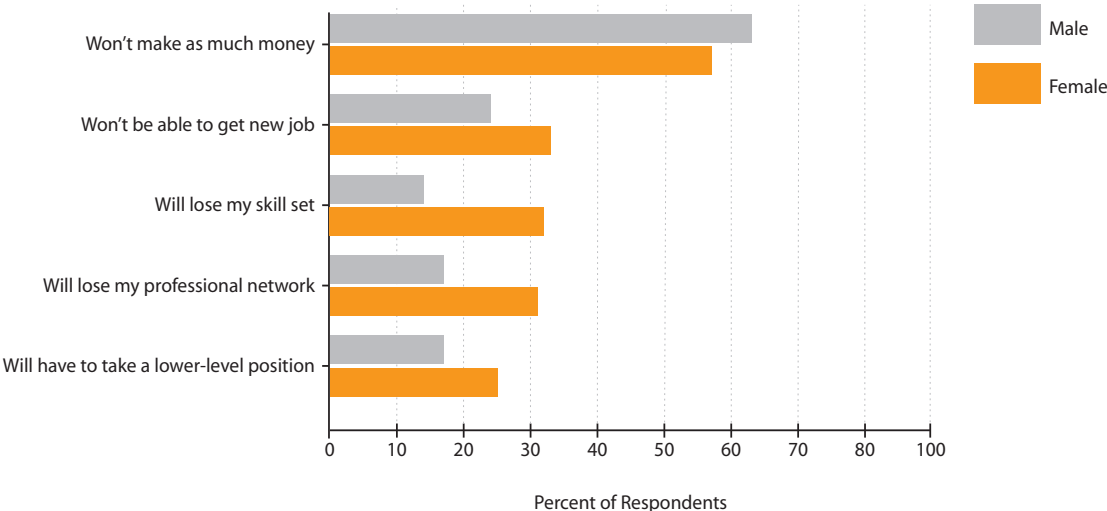
N=190

Figure 2. Percent of Professionals Who Would Consider Leaving the Workforce for a Period of Time, by Gender and Age Group



N=312

Figure 3. Reasons for Not Leaving the Workforce, by Gender



N=312

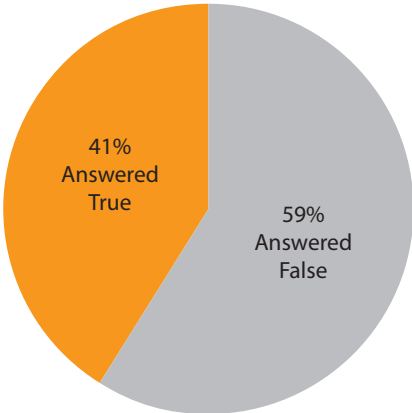
Table 1. Current Use of Different Talent Recruitment Pools

	Count	Percent
Contract, project-based employees	141	74
Former employees of my company	116	61
Applicants seeking flexible work options	64	34
Applicants who have been absent from the workforce for a period of time	69	36
We do not consider any of the above as part of our current recruitment pool	23	12

N=190

Figure 4. Perception of Women and Men Who Have Left Workforce

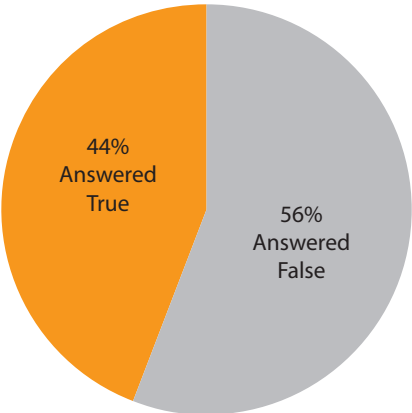
When considering a hire, our company is probably more understanding of women who have left the workplace than of men...



N=152

Figure 5. Perception of People With Children Who Have Left Workforce

When considering a hire, our company is probably more understanding of applicants with children who has left the workplace than of those applicants who are not parents...



N=152

About Aquent, Tuck, and Work+Life Fit, Inc.

ABOUT AQUENT (aquent.com)

For twenty years Aquent has led the way in transforming how companies find and utilize marketing and creative talent to execute their brand strategies. Aquent's pioneering approach to staffing and services has helped thousands of companies—including two-thirds of the Fortune 500 and 90 of the Fortune 100—build their internal marketing and communication capabilities. Last year, we placed over 11,000 Aquent talent at more than 3,000 companies. Aquent is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts.

ABOUT THE TUCK SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AT DARTMOUTH (tuck.dartmouth.edu)

Founded in 1900, Tuck was the first graduate school of management and consistently ranks among the top business schools worldwide. Tuck remains distinctive among the world's great business schools by combining human scale with global reach, rigorous coursework with experiences requiring teamwork, and valued traditions with innovation.

ABOUT WORK+ LIFE FIT, INC. (www.worklifefit.com)

Work+Life Fit, Inc., is a New Jersey-based consulting firm that specializes in developing and operationalizing innovative flexibility strategies for organizations and individuals based upon the proprietary Work+Life Fit Partnership model. Clients include companies such as AstraZeneca, BASF, BDO Seidman, LLP, Ernst & Young, GlaxoSmithKline, JPMorgan Chase, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, Microsoft, Novo Nordisk, and Quaker.

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